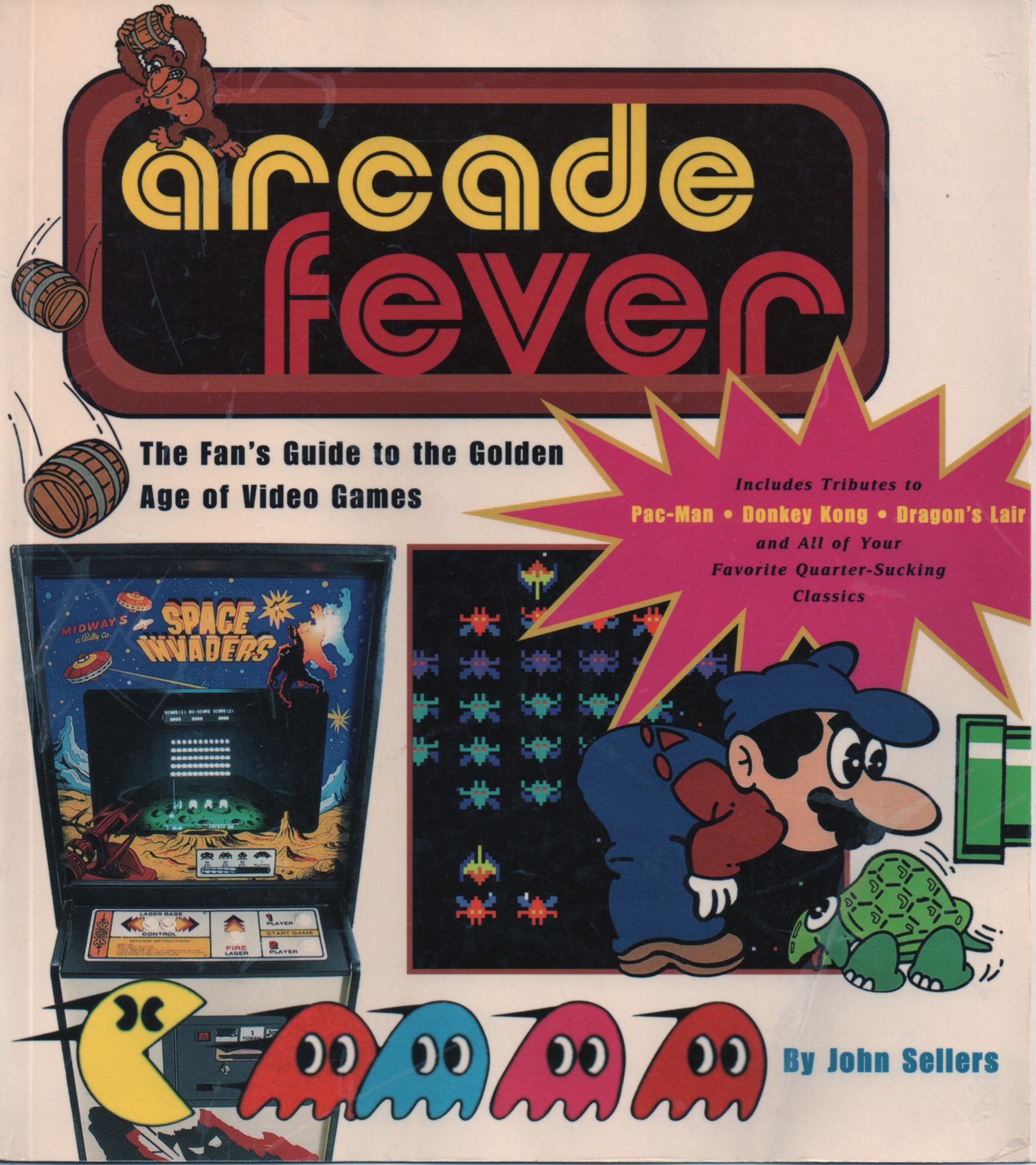
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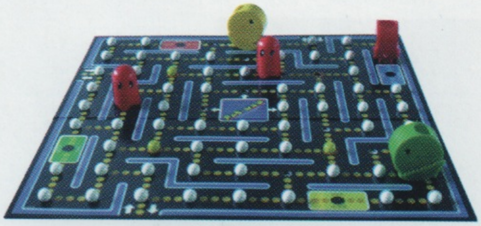
a Bally Co.
SPACE INVADERS
LASER BASE
CONTROL
FIRE
LASER
1 PLAYER
START GAME
2 PLAYER

arcade fever

The Fan's Guide to the Golden Age of Video Games

Includes Tributes to
Pac-Man • Donkey Kong • Dragon's Lair
and All of Your
Favorite Quarter-Sucking
Classics

By John Sellers



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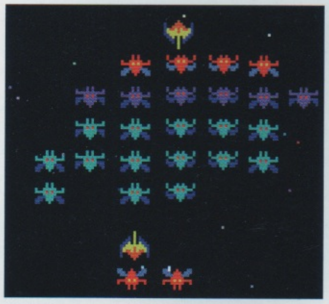

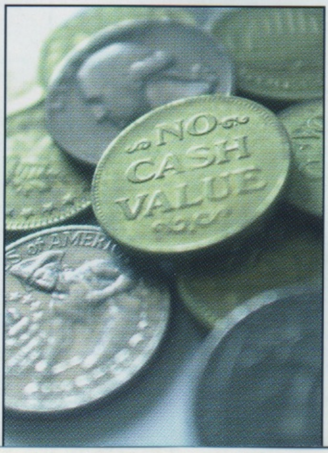
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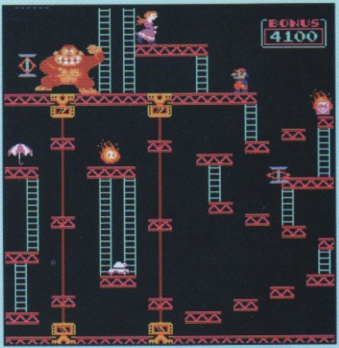
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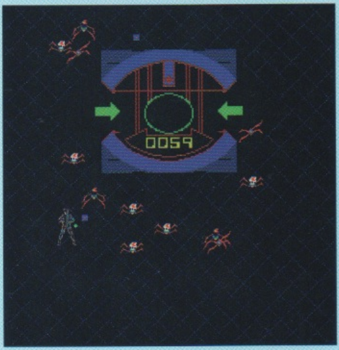
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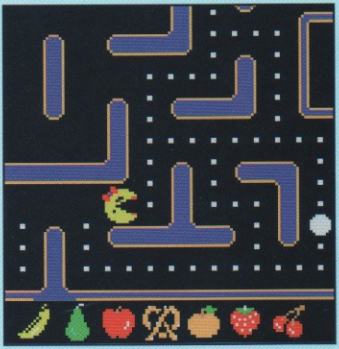

DONKEY KONG
Nintendo
4400
DONKEY KONG
JUMP
Nintendo
CONTROLLER
TOKEN

arcade fever

The Fan's Guide to the Golden Age of Video Games

By John Sellers

RUNNING PRESS
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Disclaimer

Note about the text:

The fifty highlighted arcade games were chosen solely according to the whims of the author. Every other game that is mentioned in *Arcade Fever* was selected solely at the discretion of the author. So before anyone gets all up in arms about the fact that he never even once makes mention of the game Amidar, please be aware that he just did.

Note about the artwork:

For certain games, screen shots were taken with the help of a fancy emulation device known as MacMAME. While the author realizes and regrets the inherent lameness of this decision, he promises he did it only to capture the feel for a particular title that would not otherwise have been possible, either financially or physically. In every case, he received permission to publish the image from the appropriate copyright holder. Also, in every case, the original arcade game itself can be found in the awesome collection of Videotopia, a preservation museum that generously allowed *Arcade Fever* to photograph its material. Neither Videotopia nor the author supports emulators in any way, except perhaps to play Pooyan, a really stupid but addictive game featuring a bunch of pigs that the author can't find anywhere else. But in the end, he believes: There is nothing like the real thing.

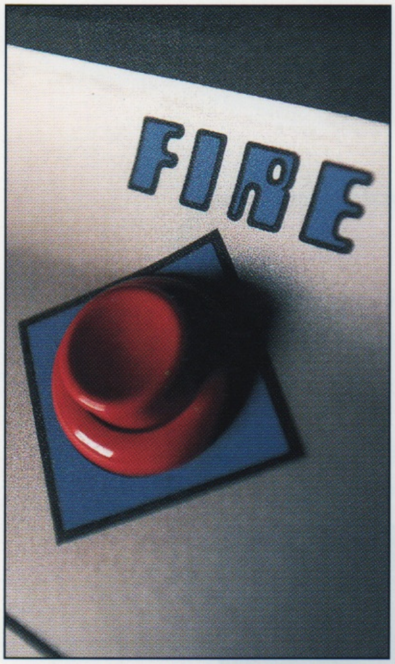
Dedication

To my older brother, Mark, who once made me sit at the Windjammer for three hours while he racked up two million on Pac-Man and who always made a point of beating me at my favorite games.

To my younger brother, Matt, who once jumped head-first into the glass doors of Someplace Else Arcade and who bagged Princess Daphne at the age of six at ShowBiz Pizza Place.

PAC-MAN
by MIDWAY
MOVE

acknowledgements



First, the author would like to paraphrase his favorite childhood book:
General Jason Rekulak gave the order
Major Molly Jay brought the editing
Captain Keith Feinstein brought the games
Sergeant Steve Belkowitz brought the photographs
Corporal Corinda Cook brought the design
Private Sam Caggiula brought the publicity
But Drummer Hoff fired it off.

Next, *Arcade Fever* wouldn't have been the same without the help of these fine video-game folks:
Jerry Buckner + Gary Garcia; Nolan Bushnell; Walter Day; Eugene Jarvis; Jeff Anderson; Roger Sharpe; Gary Goldman at Don Bluth Films; Hitoshi Chosakabe at Data East; Laura Pokrifka and Mark Goodreau at Hasbro Interactive; Takashi Nagato, Hiroyuki Miwa, Yoshibumi Kimura, Mary Hermanson and Kirk Prindle at Konami; Diana Fuentes and David Greenspan at Midway; Lucinda Bender at Namco; Tom Harlin at Nintendo; Teri Higgins at Sega; Gary Stern at Stern Pinball; Hiroshi Otsuka at Taito; Tracii Andrews at uWink.com, Chris Olmstead at Golin Harris; Christopher Holm at Lucasfilm; Margaret Adamic at Disney; Rob Wheat; James Caruso at JM Production Company; Tomoko Kawamoto at American Museum of the Moving Image; Maryanne Lataif and Darek Cannole at Activision.

Then, free credits on their favorite games must go to:
Emily Stone, my mom, my dad (who I once beat 105-12 in Intellivision Baseball), "D.J. Philly" Phil + Nicole Kim, Greg Emmanuel + Jessica Chesler, Chris + Noelle Bruno, Bernie + Lydia Su, "Generous" John Hodgman, Brett Martin, Rob "Official Denial" Kemp, Joel Stein, A.J. Jacobs, Gennifer Birnbach, Jennifer Worick, Terence Gray, Ari Yolkut, the Enid's softball team, David Egner, Tom Macek, and Matt "Pelican Pants" Larson.

Finally, the author acknowledges that he owes a great deal of his personality to:
Nicholson Baker, Ian Curtis, Denny's Moons Over My Hammy, the dude who played the Emperor in *Return of the Jedi,* Goofus and Gallant, Jud Heathcote, the interstitial music in *The Brady Bunch,* John Ritter, the Sasquatch and anyone who had anything to do with *The Barbarian Brothers.*

photo credits

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GALAXIAN
FIRE
FIRE

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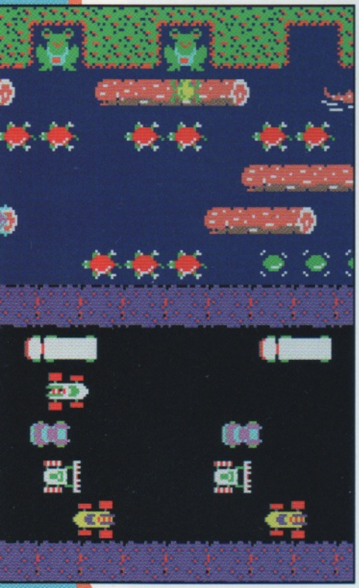

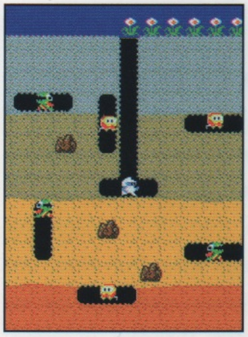

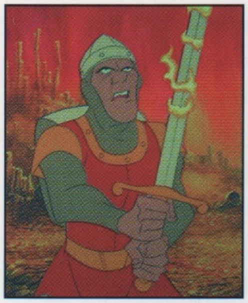

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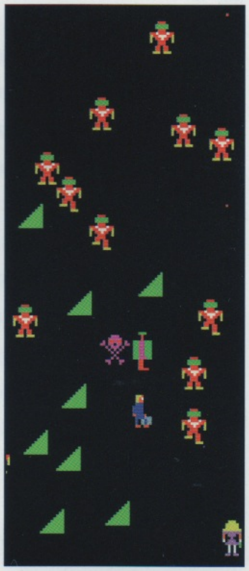


DISCS OF TRON

introduction

there's something about your first piece. . . .

I lost my video-game virginity at the age of six during an otherwise unmemorable afternoon at Cannonsburg Ski Area outside of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The game was Breakout, it was early 1977 and my mind was ready to explore the world beyond Mister Mouth and Hungry Hungry Hippos. As I watched that older kid bouncing a little blip around the screen and so clearly enjoying himself, I knew that I wasn't going to be making any more runs down the slopes that day. You can't fracture your leg playing Breakout.

All of us who were lucky to be coming of age in those early days can remember our moment of video-game zen, that first time we realized that there was something important about these simple points of light moving around a monitor. Nothing in our experience could have prepared us for our fateful first encounter with such space-age technology; this, of course, was before the general public became reliant on personal computers, ATMs, cable television, VCRs, compact discs and *Star Wars.* Video games were a full light year ahead of pinball and Pet Rocks, and ours was the lucky generation that got to take the rocket on its premiere voyage.

So we remember the first quarter we borrowed from our parents, the first fire button we pressed, the first time we realized that we could actually control what was happening to those electronic images in front of us. We still get vivid flashes of afternoons spent playing Space Invaders at our local 7-Eleven, entire weekends staring goggle-eyed as we mastered Pitfall! on our Atari 2600s, that beautiful hour when we skipped gym class to blow our entire allowance on Asteroids, the surprising discovery of a Wizard of Wor in the wallpaper store our mom dragged us to. We can recall, if we strain hard enough, rows upon rows of blinking and beeping video games standing at attention in the arcade. And not just any arcade, either, but *our* arcade. The one where we tested our mettle against total strangers and stacked up quite nicely, thank you very much.

Putt-Putt Golf & Games in suburban Grand Rapids was my second home during the arcade years—a period roughly bookended by 1978 and 1985 and now grandiosely referred to as the Golden Age of Video Games. And what a pleasure it was to walk into Putt-Putt, an arcade so different than and yet so similar to those thriving in every single town in America back then. Even before you opened the door, you could hear the all-too-familiar noises: the staccato firing of Robotron, the plinky "How High Can You Get?" of Donkey Kong, the rousing Tron grid bug theme, the blustery narration from Dragon's Lair, even the clunks of the Skee-Ball that had infiltrated the place once reserved for a sit-down Pole Position. Your first stop was always the token machine to load up on a few handfuls of the indigenous currency, and, after buying a fountain Coke bigger than your head, it was off to survey the territories.

Just like Hollywood releases, there was a new game out nearly every week, and I took it upon myself to check out each and every one of them. Over the years that I was a Putt-Putt regular, I left my mark—that is, my initials, JAS—on everything from Asteroids to Zaxxon. I learned stuff, too, especially about money management: If you have only 20 tokens, and your mom isn't coming to get you for five hours, you must average fifteen minutes per game in order not to have to bum tokens off people. Being at an arcade with no money was like being a sex addict at a convent: You had to do a lot of talking if you wanted to get some play.

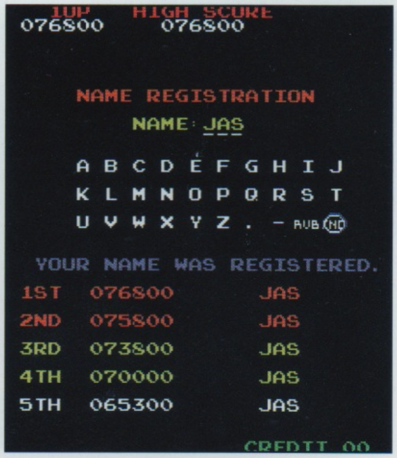
Like the vast majority of arcade alums, I was neither the best player nor the worst, but I thought that I could beat anyone at any of *my* games. (And we all had our favorites: Mine were Donkey Kong and Star Wars; my older, better brother Mark's were Track and Field and Pac-Man; yours might have been Popeye, Ms. Pac-Man, Tempest, or any of the thousands of other games that turned up during the formative arcade years.) Truth be told, there was always a bigger dog—some king of Congo Bongo or potentate of Pooyan—who would come around when I wasn't there and blow my piddly scores and initials off the high-score board.

Such was the beauty of the arcade—and I use the past tense because the arcades of our youth are long gone now, suffocated by years of Doom and dot.coms and far too many Mortal Kombat clones. The arcade was the place you came to watch the amazing players perform, steal their moves, and then beat the crap out of them. As much fun as it was to whip your younger brother at Miner 2049er on your Apple IIe or to kick your dad's ass at Intellivision Baseball or to smack your best pal down at Coleco Head-to-Head Football in the luxury of your own home, being at the top of the arcade heap was just that much more enticing. There was plenty of glory to be found there: Each of us had that one game, the best game of our lives, that caused five or ten spectators to fan around behind us, all straining to watch us blow away the existing high score on a particular machine. After that spectacular feat, you might even have become an arcade celebrity, referred to only by your initials: "Dude, JAS got 266,400 on Donkey Kong!"

As important to preserve as such memories are—and the video-game industry was built on millions more just like them—it's even more crucial to honor the classic games themselves and anyone who had anything to do with them. And before it's too late. To draw some simplistic parallels to an artistic medium that currently benefits from a great deal of preservation, primitive arcade games like Pong and home titles such as Yars' Revenge are the silent films that came before the talkies of Tekken and Myst. Pac-Man is Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp. Atari is RKO Pictures.

So, as you flip through *Arcade Fever,* which is humbly dedicated to the sights and sounds and memories of the Golden Age of Video Games, ask yourself the questions that never seem to get asked in this advanced age of PlayStation 2 and the Internet: How would we be spending our leisure time nowadays if Space Invaders hadn't come down the pike way back in 1978? Would Earth be as inhabitable without Pac-Man? Is Atari the best company ever created by man, or just the second best (behind Nintendo)? Whither the gentle Pengo? Who betrayed the arcade? How much do I miss my Atari 2600, and, more specifically, the game Barnstorming? Shouldn't Computer Space, the world's first arcade video game, be in the Smithsonian? Where is the love?

Hopefully, you'll find it in here. Enjoy!

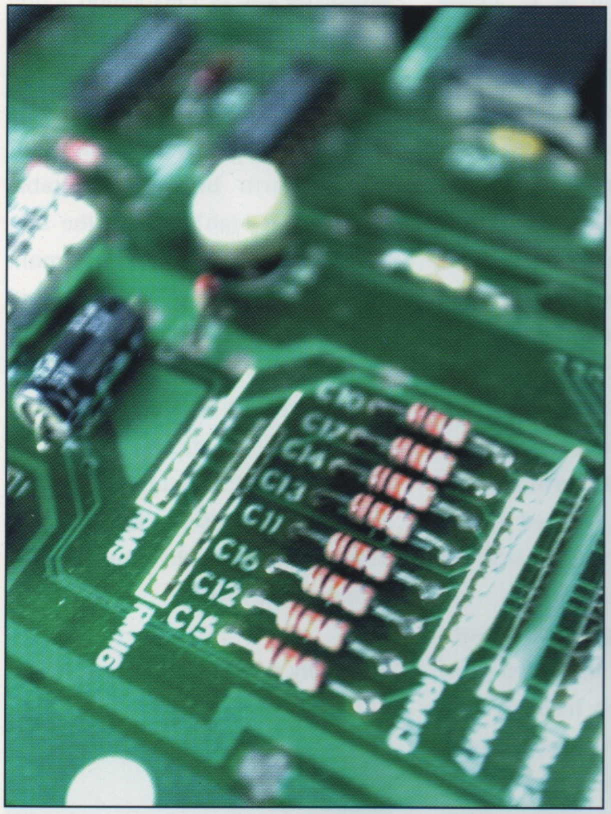


```
  1UP      HIGH SCORE
076800      076800

     NAME REGISTRATION
         NAME: JAS

     A B C D E F G H I J
     K L M N O P Q R S T
     U V W X Y Z . - RUB END

 YOUR NAME WAS REGISTERED.
1ST  076800        JAS
2ND  075800        JAS
3RD  073800        JAS
4TH  070000        JAS
5TH  065300        JAS

                 CREDIT 00
```

insert token

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
QUARTER DOLLAR
NO CASH VALUE

Parts is parts: Games came with their own circuitry and controls, and in all shapes and sizes (opposite page), making the arcade an anthropological funhouse.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PUSH TO REJECT
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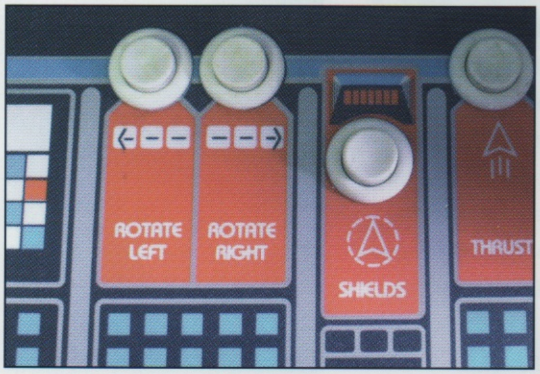
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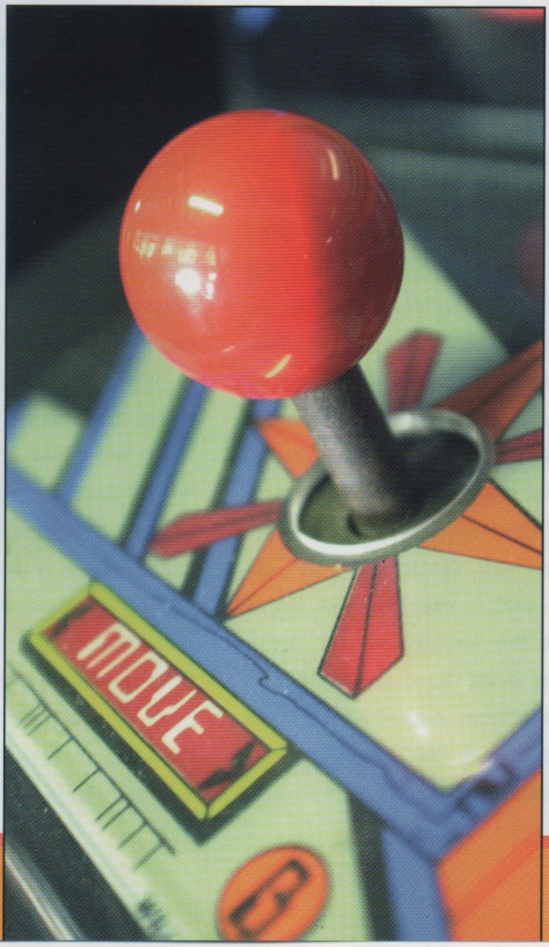
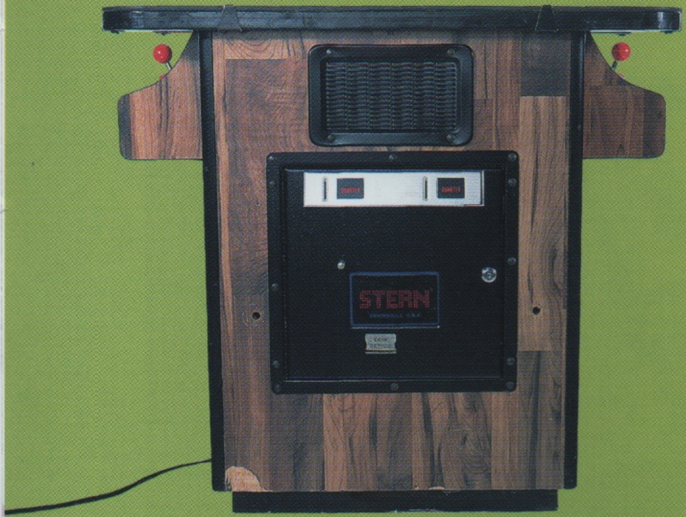
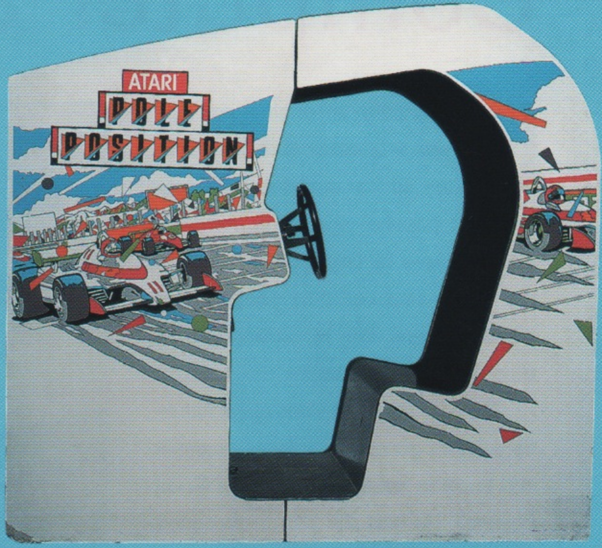
ROTATE RIGHT
SHIELDS
THRUST





Cocktail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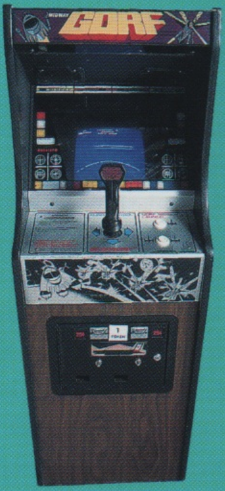
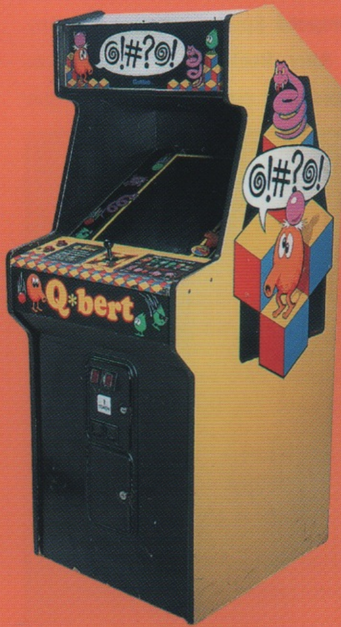
POLE
POSITION

Cockpit



Cabaret



Upright

Computer Space

It wasn't entirely an original concept, and it was a colossal dud. Yet 1971's Computer Space—modeled on Spacewar!, the popular mainframe computer game beloved by engineering majors in the 1960s—deserves to be recognized as the Adam and Eve of arcade games. Clap those hands, people!

The coin-operated video game industry owes its genesis to a young engineer and budding entrepreneur named Nolan Bushnell. He was the first to recognize that a primitive computer game such as Spacewar! (in which your triangular blip fought a frisky flying-saucer blip) could be introduced as a stand-alone product for amusement at bars and arcades. Not that Computer Space brought home any bacon. After Bushnell, doing business as a company called Syzygy, sold the concept to a small California coin-op company with the kooky name Nutting Associates, the game went on to ship fewer than 1,500 machines.

And with good reason. Nixon-era teenagers used to simple pinball flippers were confused and frightened by Computer Space's futuristic fiberglass cabinet and finger-exhausting controls. You needed two buttons to turn your ship around, one to thrust forward and yet another to fire. Adolescents who chanced upon it said "Dude, that crud's for nerds!" and went home to their Erector Sets. (Eight years later, these same idiots were jamming on Asteroids, which had even more "nerdy" controls.)

The game improved slightly with the subsequent release of the two-player, head-to-head version due to its introduction of a sensible contraption called a joystick and the fact that it was much more fun blasting your buddy than some slow-moving flying saucer. Even so, Computer Space was doomed to join Fat Albert at the junkyard, and, truth be told, the primitive gameplay probably only ever appealed to people who were learning how to program in Fortran. Weep not for Nolan Bushnell, though. A year later, he founded Atari, put out Pong and became known as "The Father of the Video Game Industry." Not a bad title for someone of such humble beginnings.

START GAME
NUTTING ASSOCIATES
MT. VIEW, CALIF.

Color Code

The fiberglass cabinets on both the one- and two-player versions came in three different, space-age colors: glittering green, glittering red and glittering blue.

Game: Computer Space

Year: 1971

Manufacturer: Nutting Associates

Controls: Two rotate buttons, fire button, thrust button

Plot: Shoot a spitting-mad flying saucer before it shoots you

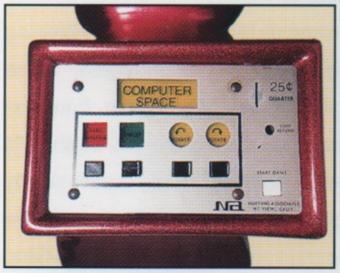
Major milestone: The first coin-operated video game

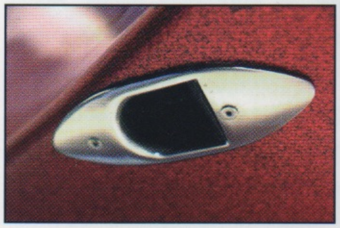
Inner Space

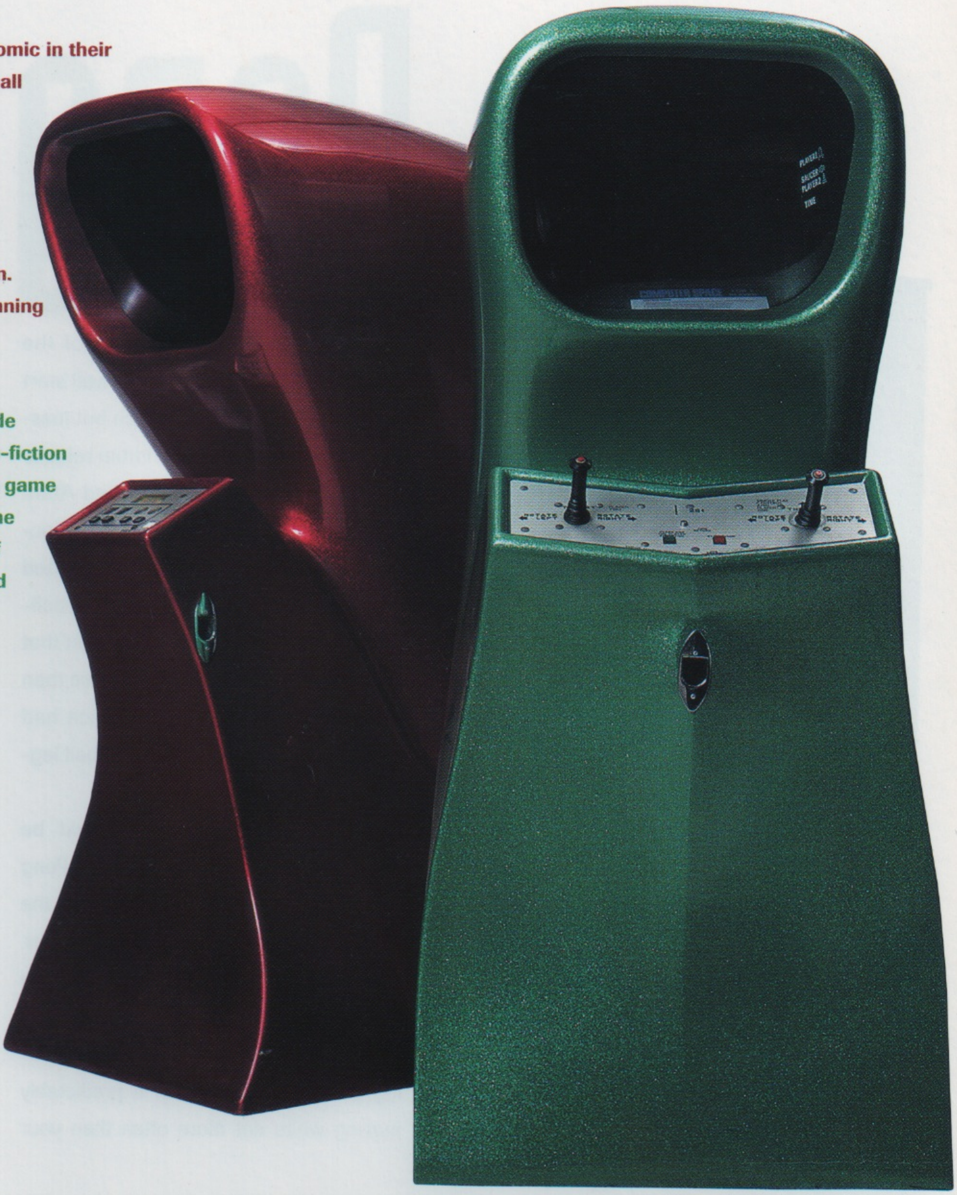
The guts of Computer Space were almost comic in their simplicity. The computer, consisting of a small circuit board, was referred to in a Nutting promotional flyer as "the Brain Box." The monitor was nothing more than a 13-inch black-and-white General Electric television set. The coin box used to collect quarters was converted from an old paint-thinner can. Oh, and electricity came from a hamster running on a treadmill.

Green Machine

Computer Space won a cameo role alongside Charlton Heston in the bizarre 1973 science-fiction flick *Soylent Green,* making it the first video game to be used as a prop in a movie. The machine appeared in a few scenes in both on and off modes, and had been painted white to blend in with the minimalist surroundings.







1971

In headlines:

The Pentagon Papers published to chagrin of Nixon administration; *Playboy* publishes pubic hair to chagrin of bra-burning feminists

At theaters:

The French Connection kicks off car chase craze; *Shaft* introduces us to the black private dick who gets all the chicks

On TV:

All in the Family opening credits increase need for mute button technology; Bobby and Cindy Brady get lost in the Grand Canyon

In music:

Led Zeppelin's *Stairway to Heaven* becomes instant rock cliche; Jim Morrison dies of heart attack while bathing

Pong

Every story has a beginning . . .

If you're looking for the origin of the video-game craze, you may as well start with 1972's incredibly low-tech but massively addictive Pong, the initial release by a mysterious company called Atari. While Computer Space holds the distinction of being the original coin-operated video game, its simple two-player ball-and-paddle successor was the first that anyone actually wanted to try more than once. Soon everybody in America had channeled the enthusiastic baseball legend Ernie Banks: Let's play two!

Of course, drying paint would be more fun to watch than a game of Pong nowadays. A monkey could follow the two-step instructions: "Insert quarter. Avoid missing ball for high score." The gameplay was nearly as laughable. Using a rotating dial, you tried to put your analog paddle in the path of a predictably moving white dot more often than your opponent did. That was it. Compared to the relative complexity of Computer Space, Pong was the arcade equivalent of the kid's game patty cake, only without the annoying "baker's man" limerick.

The idea for the unassuming table tennis homage came from none other than Nolan Bushnell, who had designed Computer Space a year earlier. Even though his first stab at video-game glory had proven to be a flop for Nutting Associates, Bushnell nonetheless took his royalty earnings and tried to incorporate, with partner Ted Dabney, his fledgling engineering company Syzygy (so named because he liked the word's auspicious meaning: an alignment of celestial bodies). By the end of 1972, the firm, now bearing the more easily pronounceable name Atari (an attack term taken from the Japanese strategy game Go, Bushnell's favorite hobby), had successfully launched the game that altered the career trajectory of quarters everywhere.

Like all worthwhile things, Atari's first release did not come without difficulty. After consumer-testing had begun on the game—first at the Sunnyvale, California, watering hole Andy Capp's, where a prototype broke down on its

1972

In headlines:
Terrorists mar Mark Spitz's perfect Munich Olympics; Nixon bitch-slaps McGovern in presidential election

At theaters:
The Godfather makes us an irrefutable offer; X-rated *Deep Throat* goes down without a hiccup

On TV:
Monster *M*A*S*H* becomes an all-time smash; classy debut of *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* isn't like school on Sunday

In music:
Don McLean's *American Pie* becomes most overrated song ever; Alice Cooper proclaims that *School's Out*

Pong and On

Not to be outdone by its obnoxious imitators, Atari itself flooded arcades with myriad versions of Pong. Besides the player-versus-player original, the company released straight-up adaptations such as Pong Doubles (1973), Super Pong (1974) and Quadrapong (1974) and test-marketed a few more bizarre prototypes: Snoopy Pong, which had a cabinet shaped like a red dog house with Charlie Brown's lovable pooch lying on top; Pin Pong, which added a pinball element; and Puppy Pong, a lawsuit-proof version of Snoopy Pong designed for entertainment at doctors' offices. Woof!

first night after becoming too congested by coins—Atari was slapped with a copyright-infringement lawsuit by Magnavox, makers of Ralph Baer's home video system Odyssey, which had debuted its paddle hockey earlier in 1972. (Atari rightfully lost and eventually coughed up a reported $700,000 in royalties, but retained the right to manufacture its game.) Also, countless Pong clones, such as Allied Leisure's Paddle Battle, cropped up at bars and arcades across the country, further sapping Atari's profit.

Bushnell and company got the last laugh when their superior small-screen Pong system landed in over a hundred thousand homes starting in 1975. Now you could play virtual table tennis on the television, and let your real deal Ping-Pong table rot downstairs in the rec room. Getting kids to exercise has been difficult ever since.

Game: Pong

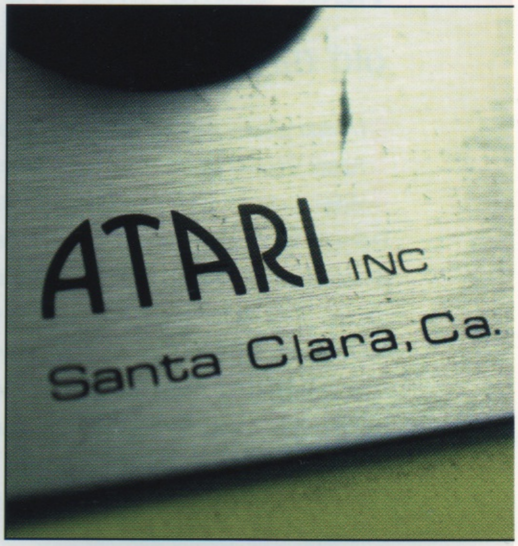
Year: 1972

Manufacturer: Atari

Control: Two-direction rotary dial

Plot: Use your paddle to "avoid missing ball for high score"

Major milestone: First successful coin-operated video game



Al Anon

While the initial motivation behind Pong came from Bushnell—who had seen a version of Magnavox's Odyssey at a demonstration (hence the lawsuit)—it was actually Atari's first employee, Al Alcorn, who designed and programmed the game we all know and love. They're still in cahoots with each other to this day: Alcorn is the official owner of the prototypical Pong machine but it sits proudly in Nolan Bushnell's Los Angeles office.

1973

In headlines:
"I am not a crook"; George Steinbrenner swallows New York Yankees; Secretariat hooves it hard-style

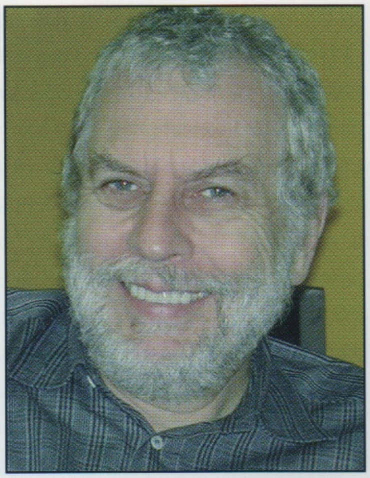
At theaters:
Fun with projectile vomit in *The Exorcist*; Bruce Lee beats the crap out of goons in posthumous *Enter the Dragon*

On TV:
Ubiquitous Watergate hearings make it tricky to watch *Sanford and Son*; Kojak sucks on his first lollipop

In music:
Marvin Gaye grooves with *Let's Get It On*; Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* begins hogging the Billboard chart

The Visionary

Nolan Bushnell, the creator of the first coin-operated video game and the founder of Atari, reminisces about the good old days of animatronic mice and space men



If video games can be compared to baseball, then Nolan Bushnell is the industry's Abner Doubleday. The California entrepreneur created the world's first coin-operated video game in 1971 with Computer Space and quickly founded Atari, the company that said "play ball!" with its release of the 1972 megahit Pong. Just four years later, when Bushnell sold off his stake to Warner Bros. for a cool $28 million, arcades had become the hip place to hang out. After leaving the company, he bought Atari's interest in the fledgling Pizza Time Theater chain of video-game-fueled eating establishments and, after changing the name to the kid-friendly Chuck E. Cheese, he kicked off yet another feeding frenzy. Now 58, Bushnell runs the Los Angeles–based uWink.com, a site he'd like to turn into the number one pay-gaming portal on the Internet. *Arcade Fever* tugged on the coattails of the man rightly known as the "Father of the Video Game Industry."

Arcade Fever: When Computer Space came out, it just bewildered people, right?

Nolan Bushnell: It actually did.

AF: What was the problem?

NB: There was too much innovation. It looked strange, and all of a sudden you have this TV set going in there. I remember a couple of the operators saying, "Oh, we can't do that. People will steal the TV sets out of them."

AF: You licensed that game to a company called Nutting Associates. Did you have trouble saying that with a straight face?

NB: *[Laughs]* You know, it is kind of a funny name. The guy's name was Bill Nutting.

AF: I wonder how much he got made fun of as a kid.

NB: He should have had a twitch.

AF: You left Nutting to found an even stranger-sounding company called Syzygy. What the heck?

NB: Syzygy was out of the dictionary and it meant "an alignment of planets." When planets are in a row it's a syzygy.

AF: Sounds like an *X-Files* term. How long was that around?

NB: Well, it turned into Atari. When we went to incorporate, Syzygy was already taken by a candlemaking company in Mendoncino. That's when we turned into Atari.

AF: Syzygy could have become a household name, then?

NB: Well, I think it was a good thing we changed it to Atari. Because people said "Siz-i-gee" and "Siz-oo-gee" and "Suz-uh-gee." It didn't roll off the tongue.

AF: Did people think Atari was a Japanese company at first?

NB: Yes, they did. But at that time in consumer electronics, it wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

AF: Where did the three-pronged Atari logo come from?

NB: It was just done by our head of creative as one of the potentials for the new Atari logo. It became known as the Fuji logo because everyone thought that it looked like a symbol for Mt. Fuji. But it was totally an arbitrary graphic.

AF: Were you upset about all the Pong clones?

NB: It pissed me off so much. This was all during 1973, and at the fall trade show the conference organizers had set up this seminar called "The Future of the Video-Game Business." And all the guys who had copied me were asked to be on the panel and I wasn't, and I was just fuming. When it came time for question-and-answer, I stood up with a microphone and said, "This is the biggest sham I've ever seen. How in the hell do these guys know what the future is when their only technical capability is copying me? I could tell you what the future is, but I don't think I'm going to. You're not going to get it from these yokels up here." And I asked each one of them, "Where did you get the design for your Pong game?" I embarrassed the shit out of them. And the whole audience gave me a standing ovation. It was one of those moments of epiphany where these guys knew they didn't have Nolan Bushnell to push around.

AF: Did you end up hiring any of those people?

NB: No, I crushed them. We had an 85 percent market share three years later.

AF: Can you describe your feeling upon realizing that Atari was a success?

NB: I can remember driving into the parking lot one time and seeing all these cars and being struck by the fact that this company was making payments on all of them.

AF: What did your office look like?

NB: Remember this was in the heyday of the 1970s, so I had old redwood planking. I had a bunch of ferns and plants hanging down from the ceiling. And off to the side I had an oak beer tap.

AF: Did you actually have beer in there?

NB: Yeah, I had beer on tap in my office. What we'd do every day was after work, all the managers would gather in my office and we'd have a beer and we would discuss games. I'd always have two of the latest prototypes in my office and we'd try to get a good feeling for what they were.

AF: Do you remember what kind of beer it was?

NB: Actually I do: Coors.

AF: Did Atari have a softball team?

NB: Oh, yeah. And we'd play touch football at the planning sessions and things like that. I broke some ribs one time, so I remember acutely. You know, guys get rough and think it's really, really fun to tackle the boss.

AF: What was Apple Computer founder Steve Jobs like when he worked at Atari?

NB: He was a bright kid. He did a couple of very interesting projects—he and (Apple Computer co-founder) Steve Wozniak did Breakout—but he was not like a major player inside the company.

AF: Did he operate under the radar?

NB: Not really. I knew him quite well. He worked on special projects so in some ways he was more directly reporting to me than to engineering in general.

AF: Did you know what he was up to?

NB: Oh, yeah. In fact, I always laugh and say I had a chance to have a third of Apple Computer for $50,000 and turned him down. Shows how smart I am.

AF: Were you sad to leave Atari?

NB: It's one of those things where I wasn't sad to leave once I realized it wasn't my company anymore. I think what I had was seller's remorse. I would have loved to stay at Atari forever when it was the kind of Atari that I envisioned. But as soon as it became the kind of company that Warner envisioned, the fascination was significantly less.

AF: How did you come up with the name Chuck E. Cheese?

NB: It was a name you can't say without smiling, and that was the rationale.

AF: Did you ever hear any stories about the Chuck E. Cheese characters giving kids animatronic nightmares?

NB: Oh, yeah. There's an axiom that says little kids are drawn to things that might scare them. I always tried to make them as friendly as possible. We also knew that little kids had love-and-hate relationship with them.

AF: How do you perceive your place in video games?

NB: I think I was the guy who started it two years earlier than it would have been started without me.

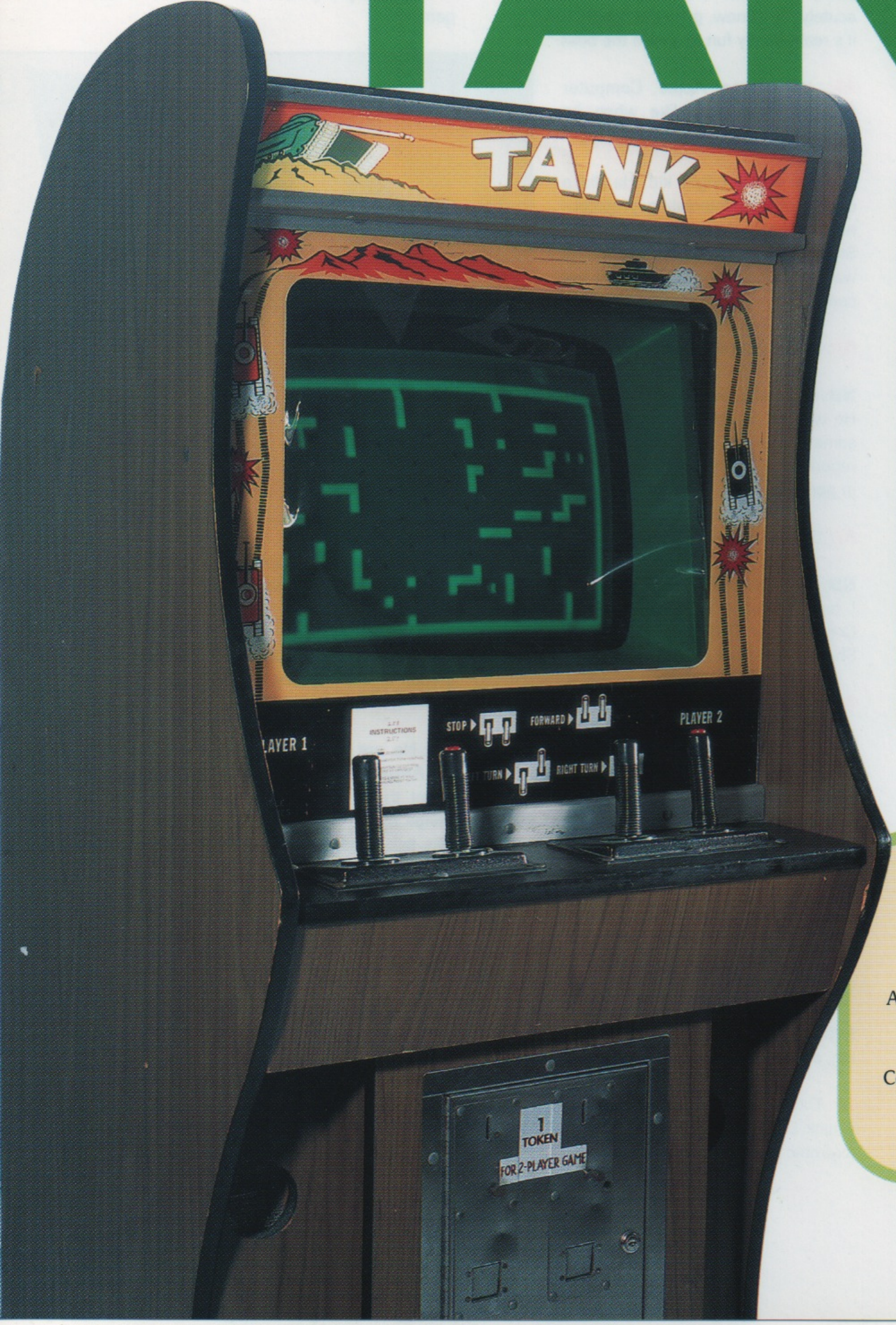
AF: Do you have a feud with Ralph Baer, the creator of the Odyssey, the first home video-game system?

NB: No, not at all. He's clearly the "Father of the Analog Video Game." There's no question about that. But innovation is one of those things that who's to say what's best. There was talk at some point of which was better: analog computers or digital computers. And I did digital and he did analog; I was really successful and he wasn't. I mean, I don't see much of a feud. *[Pause]* That was tacky, I admit.

AF: What would you say to people today who may not know who you are?

NB: I would just say that they're really lucky to be able play some of the neat stuff that they have now, instead of the kind of cheap stuff we had then.

TANK


TANK
STOP
FORWARD
PLAYER 2
PLAYER 1
RIGHT TURN
1 TOKEN FOR 2-PLAYER GAME

Game: Tank

Year: 1974

Manufacturer: Kee Games

Controls: Two-direction joysticks with fire button

Plot: Shoot your opponent's tank before it shoots you while avoiding deadly low-res mines

Major milestone: First game to use a Read-Only Memory chip

Cart Blanche

Anyone who owned the Atari 2600 knew Tank by the name Combat, one of the most successful cartridges on the system.

In the wake of Pong's remarkable success, Atari found itself the financial and innovative forerunner of an industry that hadn't yet taken shape. Still, the sophomore jinx had doomed the company's Space Race, and two other 1973 releases were just variants on the Pong concept. Competition was increasingly becoming an issue as more than a dozen different companies had put out Pong clones, some of which were arguably superior to the Atari original. The nascent industry was primed for a shakedown.

It started at the November 1973 convention of the Amusement and Music Operators Association, the coin-op expo where Pong had debuted just a year earlier. A group of prominent Atari employees announced that they had bolted the company to form Kee Games; a year later they demonstrated their first non-Pong variant, the awe-inspiring Tank, whose more detailed graphics benefitted from the use of a spacious Read-Only Memory (ROM) chip. After wowing distributors at the show, Tank went on to become the biggest hit of 1975 and turned Kee Games into Atari's number one competitor.

Secretly, Atari founder Nolan Bushnell was laughing his ass off. Having figured out that the best way to pummel the competition to create his own, he had dispatched a trusted team led by his director of marketing, Joe Keenan (the "Kee" in Kee Games), to form the fake rival corporation. The sham had been engineered to get coin-op distributors to break an unwritten rule left over from the pinball era that said that a distributor in a certain area could handle the games of only one manufacturer. A few months later, when Atari boasted that it had successfully sued Kee Games and now owned a majority stake in the company, they had access to Kee's distributors as well as their own, which revolutionized the way games were sold. In 1976, Atari folded Kee Games back under its wing and walked away from the ruse with an 85 percent share of the video-game market.

None of these subversive business dealings affected the love that people had for Tank. More adult than Pong, the Kee release was even more fun to play. Manning dual joysticks—the right one had a fire button—two players navigated realistic-looking tanks through a maze of blocks and took aim at each other. When one got hit or foolishly ran into a land mine (marked on the field by an "x"), a loud explosion rocked the machine and the other player got a point. The threat of being virtually killed in such a horrific, if low-res, fashion made Pong seem childish by comparison. Even more importantly, Tank's enhanced ROM-stored graphics knocked simple ball-and-paddle games out of the park.

Clone Ranger

Still smarting from the Pong cloning war, Nolan Bushnell and company quickly copyrighted the idea for Tank. They later added an exclamation point and to lend in order to trademark the name, and added appropriate emphasis to such an explosive game. While Atari's legal toehold deterred most competitors, at least one company came out with a knock-off, as was the case with Fun Games' shameless 1975 release Tankers.

1974

In headlines:
Nixon blinks; streaking rears its ugly head; Evel Knievel rockets into the pop-culture stratosphere

At theaters:
Jack Nicholson tapes his nose in *Chinatown*; disaster strikes twice with *Towering Inferno* and *Earthquake*

On TV:
Ingalls clan builds *Little House on the Prairie*; *Good Times* beanpole J.J. detonates "Dynomite!"

In music:
Steve Miller speaks of the "pompatus of love" in "The Joker"; pop music meets Abba's "Waterloo"

GUN FIGHT

Game: Gun Fight

Year: 1975

Manufacturer: Midway

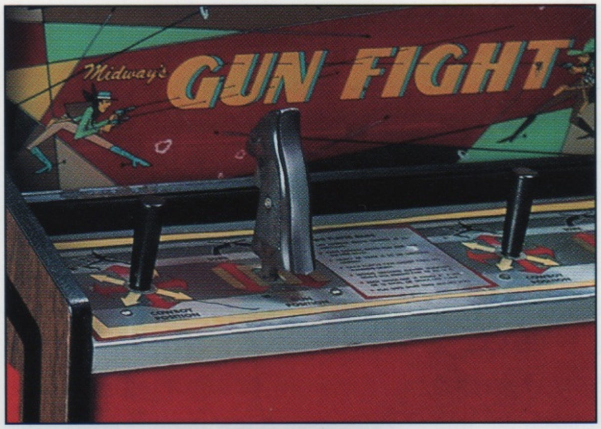
Controls: Eight-direction joystick, three-direction trigger joystick

Plot: Make like Quick Draw McGraw and outgun your lily-livered opponent

Major milestone: First game to use a microprocessor

Midway Point

Before Gun Fight, Midway had released a few Pong-inflected video games to little acclaim. Oddly enough, the Chicago-based pinball company's first effort came in 1973 with a game entitled Asteroid, which Midway licensed from Atari (based on that company's second-ever release Space Race). Please don't confuse it with Atari's pluralized 1979 classic Asteroids.



Turning Japanese

Midway licensed Gun Fight from Taito, making it the first game to be imported from overseas.

In the sublime 1953 western *Shane,* a former gunslinger arrives in a corrupt frontier town and is forced to come out of retirement and kick butt. The film's best scene: when the main villain, played with extreme sliminess by Jack Palance, calls Shane a "low-down, lyin' Yankee" and, hand on holster, issues a challenge for him to "prove it." It was the ultimate Western showdown, and shares a remarkably similar spirit with Midway's 1975 classic Gun Fight. For the first time, arcade sharpshooters could step up to the machine and prove it.

Adapted from Taito's successful Japan-released Western Gun, the licensed Midway title benefitted greatly from its use of a microprocessor, the first to be used in a video game. The extra speed—a measly two megahertz—was necessary in a primitive twitch-game like Gun Fight, where the itchiest trigger finger usually won. You and some low-down, lyin' Yankee took the

1975

In headlines:
American troops drop falling Saigon; klutzy President Ford trips

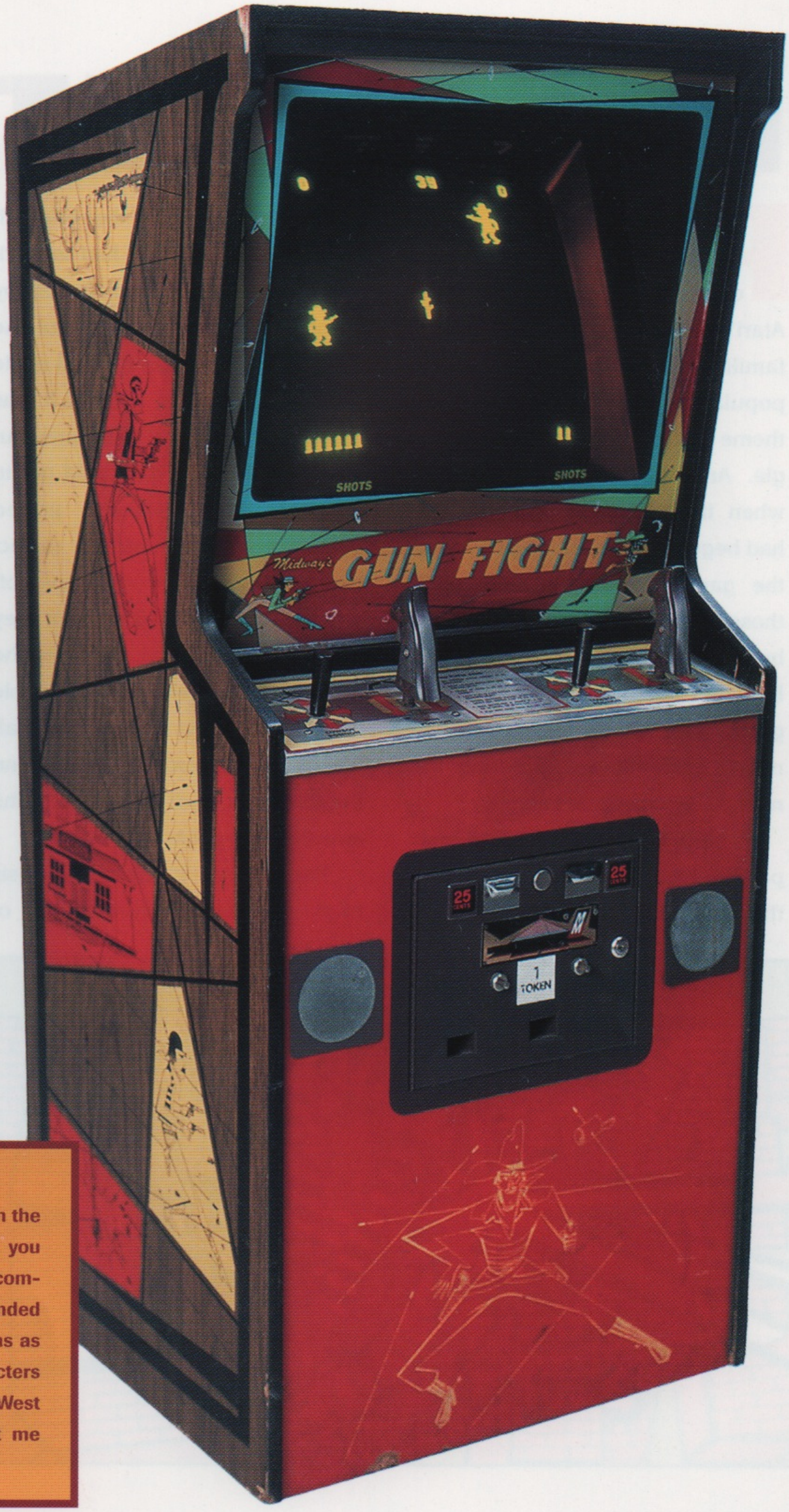
At theaters:
Spielberg puts *Jaws* in water; audiences hurl Scott toilet paper at *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*

On TV:
Fonzie jumps the barrels on *Happy Days*; Weezie and George strut their stuff in *The Jeffersons*

In music:
David Bowie celebrates his "Fame"; Bruce Springsteen laces up for "Born to Run"

guise of two contentious cowpokes and squared off across an expanse populated by cacti, ponderosa pine and an annoying covered wagon. To shoot, you manipulated your six-shooter in one of three directions, ran around your side of the screen and squeezed one off. The bullet, like the ball in Pong, could bounce off the top and bottom borders, and this was sometimes a better strategy than blasting through the stubborn sagebrush. If you hit your target, the guy threw his hands up and said, "Got me!" The player who yelled "Got me!" more times in 60 seconds lost.

A quarter century later, it's hard to believe that Gun Fight ever used state-of-the-art technology. The amorphous, black-and-white characters looked like they were lifted from a discarded Matt Groening sketchbook, and the ornery coots, while speedy in 1975, moved around slower than tumbleweeds. Nonetheless, Gun Fight turned out to be Midway's "howdy, pardner" into the big shoot-out at the arcade corral, and, from then on, they proved it.



Reload

Midway's 1977 sequel Boot Hill improved on the original in at least three capacities. First, you now had the option of playing against the computer. Second, the dialogue had been expanded beyond "Got me!" to include such witticisms as "Zap!" and "Unf!" Finally, the dueling characters had been superimposed over a cool Old West backdrop, complete with a saloon. Shoot me already and let's go grab some rye.

BREAKOUT

Game: Breakout

Year: 1976

Manufacturer: Atari

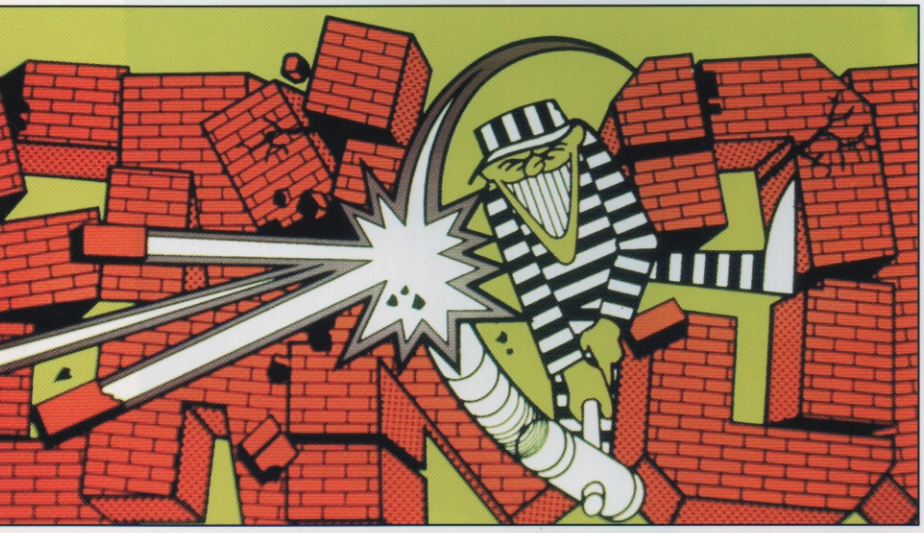
Controls: Two-direction rotary dial, serve button

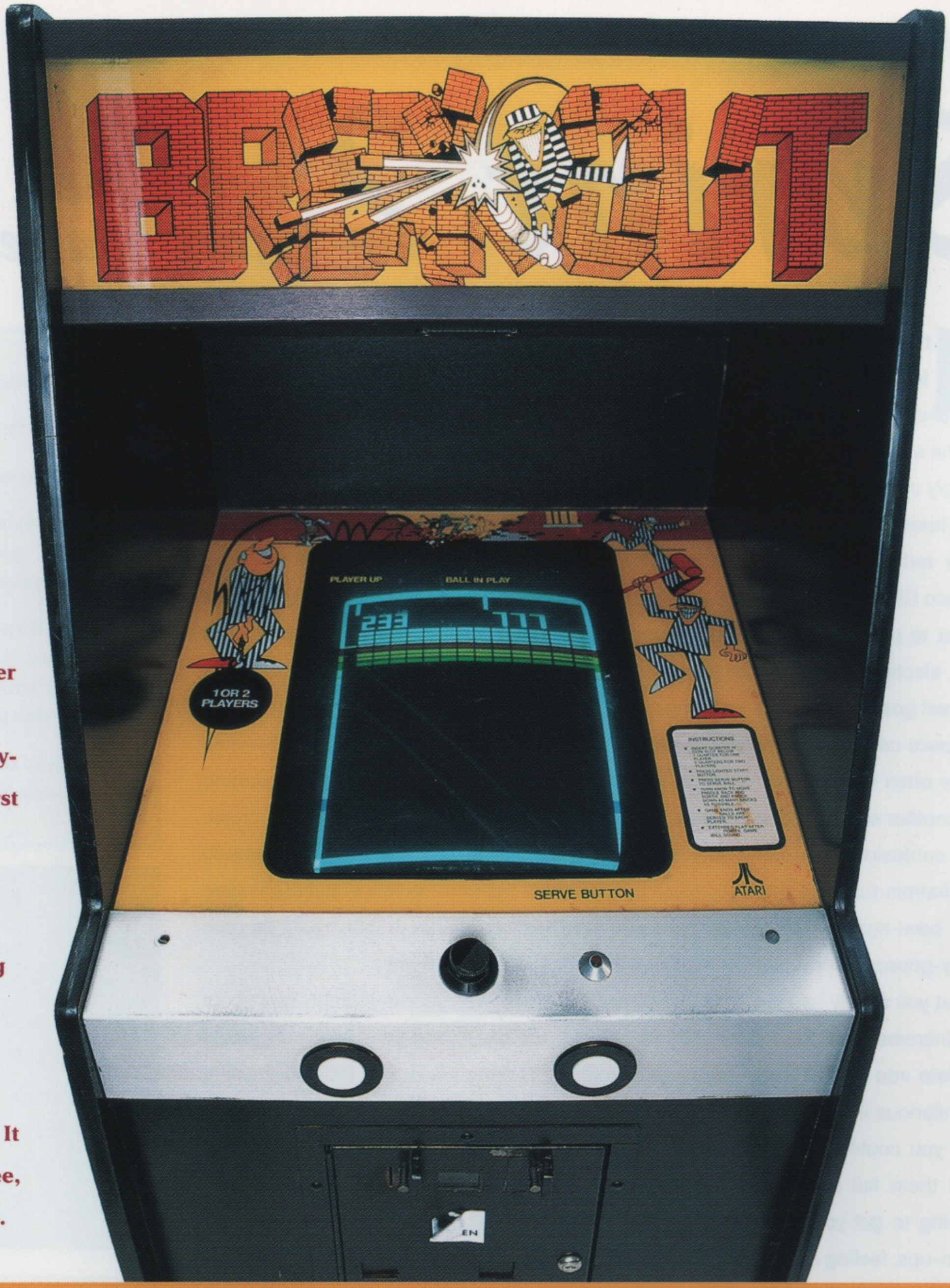
Plot: Using your paddle, bounce a ball toward the top of the screen to pummel a cluster of blocks

Plink-plink. Plunk. Plink-plink. Plunk. The cathedral chimes that emanated from Atari's 1976 hit Breakout are as familiar to a certain segment of the population as *The Brady Bunch* theme song or the Honeycomb jingle. And like that pert little ball when it had broken through and had begun to rattle around on top of the game's signature brick wall, those tinkling noises got inside your brain and did some major damage. Breakout madness, a very contagious form of dementia, reached nearly epidemic levels during the nation's bicentennial year.

A step higher on the ball-and-paddle food chain, Breakout was the first Pong descendant to be more addictive than the original. This time, you actually had to work toward a rewarding goal: To destroy all of the blocks at the top of the screen without letting the ball elude your marker on the bottom. It was repetitive slave labor, to be sure, but still a great gig if you could get it. Breakout craftspersons prided themselves in divining the correct ball trajectory that would knock off a block of their choosing, and they could quickly chisel through the brick mass to reach the vulnerable underbelly above. Then the ball would do the work for them, and they'd just sit back and listen to the sweet plinky-plinks in peace.

The story of Breakout's genesis might be the best-known sliver of arcade trivia. Atari honcho Nolan Bushnell assigned the project to a young technician named Steve Jobs, who in turn pawned off the majority of the design labor on his genius pal Steve Wozniak. Using the bare minimum of expensive ROM chips, "Woz" and Jobs finished the game in just four unbelievably quick days. Bushnell awarded Jobs a hefty completion bonus (reportedly $5,000) which he partially split with Wozniak, and the Breakout duo promptly used the proceeds to form their own company, Apple Computer. Artwork later plastered on finished Breakout cabinets featured a scene straight out of *Escape from Alcatraz,* with a convict busting through a brick wall with a hammer. Whether this was an analogy for the Atari employee who developed the game is anyone's guess, but Jobs certainly made out like a bandit.




BREAKOUT
PLAYER UP
BALL IN PLAY
1 OR 2 PLAYERS
INSTRUCTIONS
SERVE BUTTON
ATARI

Another Brick In The Wall

The inevitable sequel, 1978's Super Breakout, offered you a choice of playing options. The first rehashed the original game, another had you juggling three block-bashing balls at once, and a third added new bricks randomly as a level progressed. It was like three, three, three games in one.

1976

In headlines:
King Tut exhibit caps off bicentennial madness; Jimmy Carter makes Ford campaign look like peanuts

At theaters:
Yo, *Rocky;* audiences are mad as hell but take *Network* anyhow

On TV:
Babe heaven on *Charlie's Angels;* Col. Steve Austin rips off Sasquatch's arm

In music:
Peter Frampton comes alive; Rick Dees quacks up in "Disco Duck"

Sprint 2

Gentlemen, start your engines...

At the moment Kee Games' Sprint 2 pulled up to the starting line, the arcade forever became a pit stop for aspiring drivers. The raucous 1976 release can't claim to be the first racing game ever released—Atari's simplistic Gran Trak (1974) and the eight-player Indy 800 (1975) notably came earlier—but its unqualified success strongly indicated that the genre was here to stay. For that reason, Sprint 2 deserves to be honored with the coveted pole position among driving games.

By today's standards—and even by those established in 1980 by Sega's cool Monaco GP—Sprint 2 looks laughably unsophisticated. But who cares? The game was a blast to play. For 100 ticks on a clock, you and a friend squared off against each other, electing to drive either the white or the black car around a winding track. The only real goal was to crush your opponent, a difficult endeavor due to the fact that two gray pace cars, an inconveniently placed oil slick and a maddening number of white pylons often messed you up. Plus, the track intermittently changed without warning into another of the twelve different configurations, which had the tendency to create great confusion for you and your fellow driver. Just when you had properly prepared for a hairpin turn, the track switched to one where the area was now a straightaway. You'd bowl right into the pylon fence and lose precious inertia. It didn't help that the loosey-goosey steering wheel felt like it was made by Fisher-Price.

But you simply had to win the head-to-head battle with your opponent. Your score rose incrementally the more times you circled the track, and your final tally would translate into one of three driving designations: Granny, Rookie or Pro. Obviously it was hilarious if your rival was called a "Granny" and you weren't, so you'd do everything you could to ensure that this would happen. You'd nudge your pal's arms to make them fall off the controls, swerve your car distractedly, start trash talking—anything to get your opponent to slip up. Things could get so heated at times that grown-ups, feeling compelled to intervene, would say, "Let's keep it on the track, kids." Sprint 2 ruined a lot of friendships.

Back to the Track

Sprint 2 was not a sequel; the numeral referred to the fact that it was a two-player game. Atari, which owned Kee Games, did, however, follow up its hit with the one-player Sprint 1 (1978); the four-player Sprint 4 (1979); and the retooled color releases Super Sprint (1986) and Championship Sprint (1986). They were all just as riotous as the original.

Game: Sprint 2

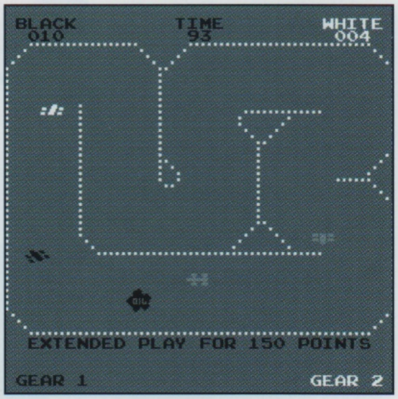
Year: 1976

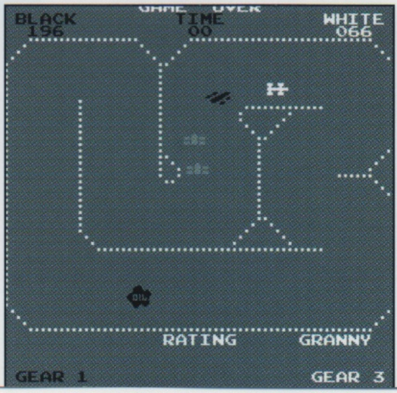
Manufacturer: Kee Games

Controls: Steering wheel, gas pedal, four-position gear shift

Plot: Outrace your friend and two devious gray cars and watch out for the ever-morphing race track

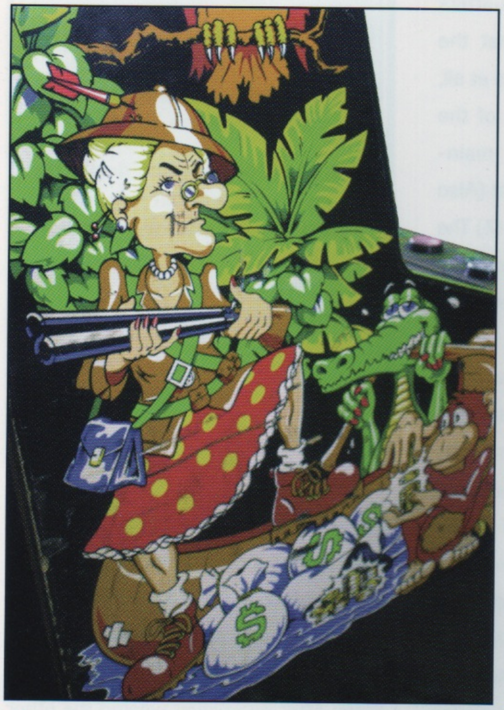
Major milestone: First successful racing game





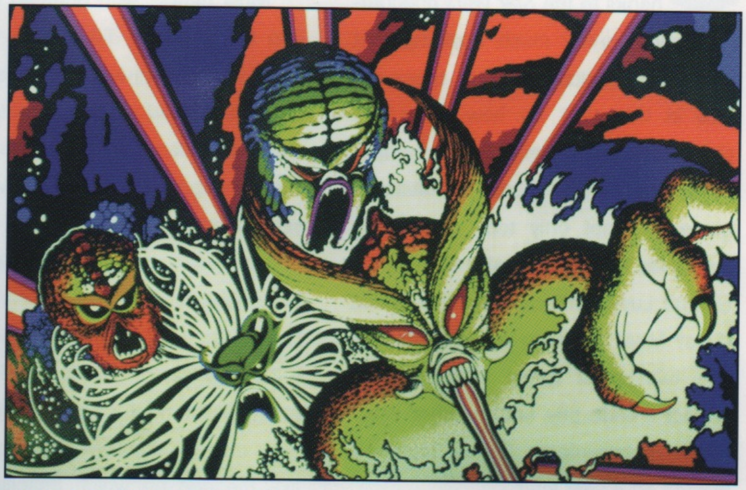
art attack

Cool cabinet design invades the arcade.



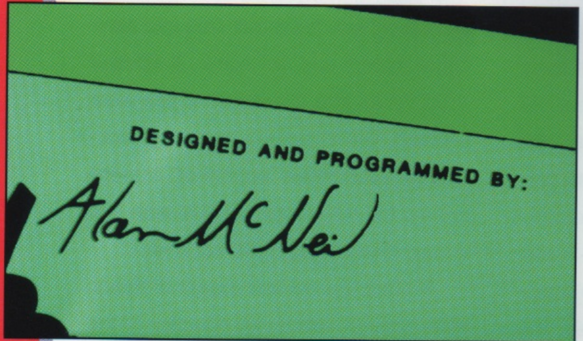
Granny and the Gators (Bally Midway, 1983)

Video merges with old lady pinball.



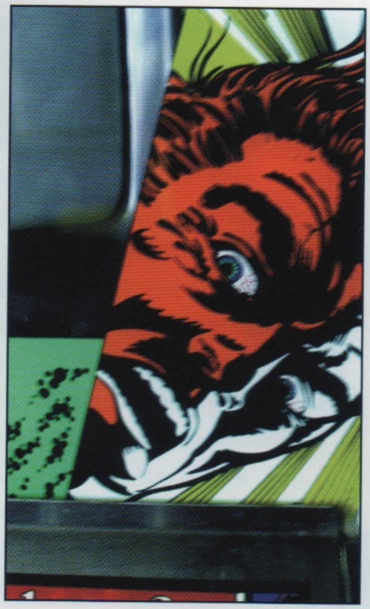
Tempest (Atari, 1981)

The freaks come out at night.


DESIGNED AND PROGRAMMED BY:
Alan McNeil

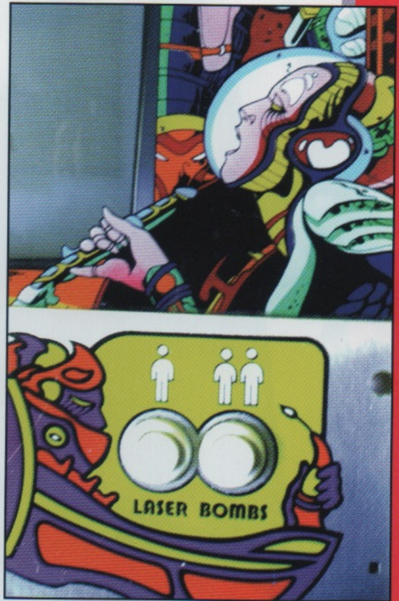
Berzerk (Stern, 1980)

Detail showing autograph



Berzerk (Stern, 1980)

Chicken!


LASER BOMBS

Scramble (Stern, 1981)

Uh, is that a flute?

Space Wars

Game: Space Wars

Year: 1977

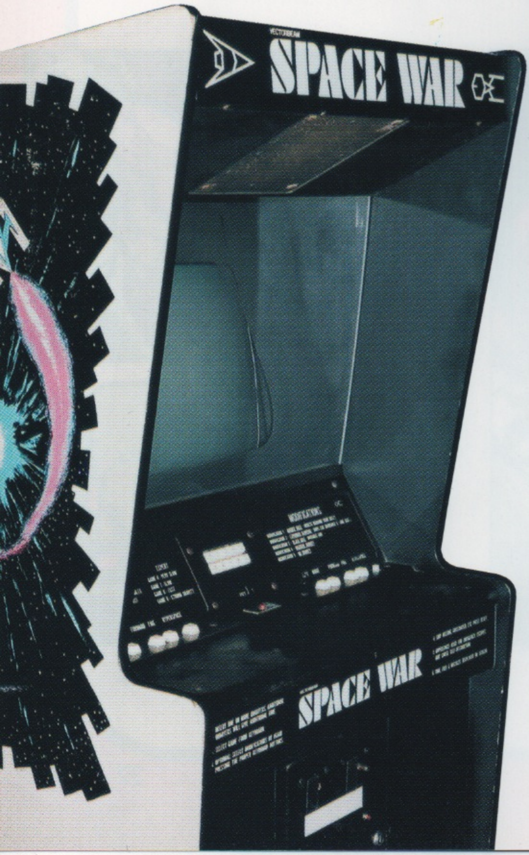
Manufacturer: Cinematronics

Controls: Two rotate buttons, thrust button, fire button, hyperspace button, ten digit game-options keypad

Plot: In a deep-space dogfight, lay waste to your friend's ship while contending with black holes, asteroids, negative gravity and other restrictive perimeters

Major milestone: First vector graphics game

Thanks to the *Star Wars* phenomenon, pretty much anything that even remotely involved space did well in late 1977. So how lucky was Cinematronics, a relatively new company on the arcade scene, to release a game that not only took place in a galaxy far, far away but also sported the George Lucas–inflected moniker Space Wars? More well than you can imagine: The two-player game remained the hottest arcade title until another interstellar masterpiece, Space Invaders, blasted off a year later.

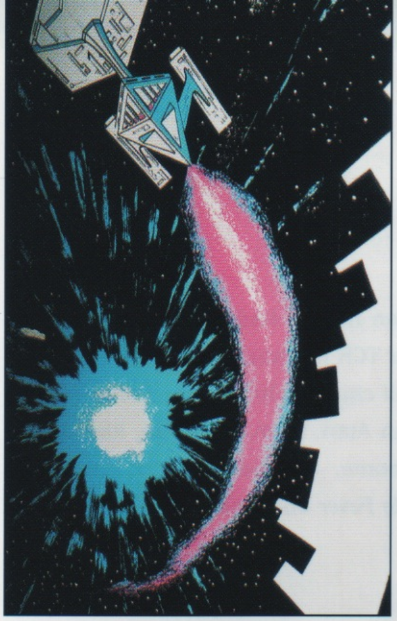


Most people who pumped quarters into the machine didn't care that the game wasn't inspired by Star Wars at all, but was instead another update of the very first video game, the 1962 mainframe computer creation Spacewar! (Also see Computer Space, pages 16–17.) The Cinematronics version, itself taken from an ambitious MIT project of new hire Larry Rosenthal, blew many who played it into hyperspace with its introduction of a brightly lit vector monitor, previously seen only on expensive supercomputers like the one on which Spacewar! was designed. If you squinted, it kind of looked like Luke Skywalker's targeting computer.

It was on this glowing screen that two subspace birds-of-prey—one looking suspiciously like the U.S.S. Enterprise and the other an obvious inspiration for the Asteroids ship—did a very vivid, very revolutionary, and very addictive dance of death with one another. At its core, Space Wars pitted player versus player to see who could kill the other more often in a certain amount of time. All sorts of groovy features enhanced the action, most notably that it let you play god and specify certain conditions under which you wanted to do battle. These options, such as "negative gravity" and "bounce back," turned the simple playing field—just a barren section of outer space—into a Thunderdome-like arena where you didn't just have to worry about your opponent but also had to watch out for such things as black holes and wayward asteroids.

Yet another fun feature of Space Wars: After one player wasted the other, the next match didn't start for approximately five seconds. During this brief bragging-rights period, the victor would most likely kick his or her ship into maximum speed and do some ill-advised stunt flying. The drawback: If you were careless, you might run into the wreckage of your fallen opponent, thereby turning the match you had just won into a draw. Served you right, hot shot.

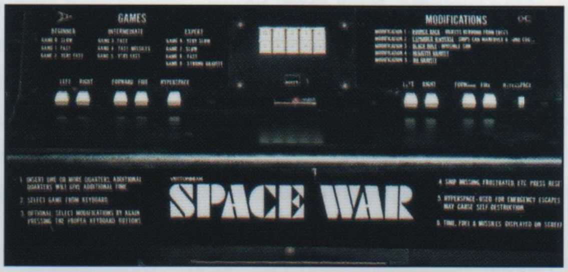
Perhaps the coolest aspect of Space Wars, though, was its introduction of the "partial damage" feature that allowed your ship to take a hit but not explode.

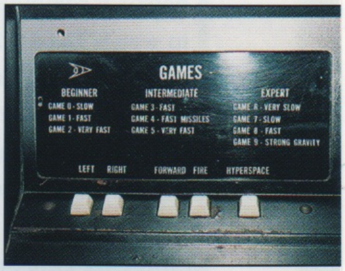


Guide to the self-programmable modifications:

1. **Bounce Back—objects rebound from edges**
2. **Expanded Universe—ships can maneuver beyond edges**
3. **Black Hole—objects sucked into center by invisible sun**
4. **Negative Gravity—objects are pushed away from center**
5. **No Gravity—no bells or whistles**

MODIFICATIONS
MODIFICATION 1 - BOUNCE BACK - OBJECTS REBOUND FROM EDGES
MODIFICATION 2 - EXPANDED UNIVERSE - SHIPS CAN MANEUVER BEYOND EDGES
MODIFICATION 3 - BLACK HOLE - INVISIBLE SUN
MODIFICATION 4 - NEGATIVE GRAVITY
MODIFICATION 5 - NO GRAVITY
LEFT RIGHT FORWARD FIRE HYPERSPACE


GAMES
MODIFICATIONS
VECTORBEAM
SPACE WAR


GAMES
BEGINNER
GAME 0 - SLOW
GAME 1 - FAST
GAME 2 - VERY FAST
INTERMEDIATE
GAME 3 - FAST
GAME 4 - FAST MISSILES
GAME 5 - VERY FAST
EXPERT
GAME 6 - VERY SLOW
GAME 7 - SLOW
GAME 8 - FAST
GAME 9 - STRONG GRAVITY
LEFT RIGHT FORWARD FIRE HYPERSPACE

Sometimes your smacked-down vessel could still thrust but not shoot; other times it was dead in the water but could still take pot shots. Nothing evinced hoots and hollers more than destroying your opponent's ship while mired in an incapacitated state.

Noticing its success, Rosenthal decided that the royalty arrangement that Cinematronics had given him for the rights to manufacture Space Wars wasn't enough. He promptly bolted to form his own company, called Vectorbeam. To further rub salt in the wound, he refined the monitor and cabinet design and began putting out his own version of the game, which he named Space War (note: the images on these pages are from this version). Cinematronics understandably freaked out and gave Rosenthal a cool million in exchange for Vectorbeam. In Space Wars, no one can hear you scream.

Space Wars was a massive hit in more ways than one. At six feet tall and with enough room for two people to stand comfortably abreast, the game coincidentally looked like one of those old mainframes. It was so gigantic, in fact, that counterweights were added to the back of the machine because it had a tendency to lurch forward. For many, getting crushed by a Space Wars wouldn't have been the worst way to go.

VECTORBEAM
SPACE WAR

1977

In headlines:
Disco den of iniquity Studio 54 opens; Son of Sam runs amok in New York

At theaters:
Luke Skywalker X-wings it in *Star Wars; Close Encounters of the Third Kind* makes mashed potato mountain

On TV:
Roots unchains Kunta Kinte; *Three's Company* giggles and jiggles

In music:
Fleetwood Mac floats some *Rumors;* Sex Pistols dis the Queen; Elvis Presley leaves the building

Homing Devices

If you squint real hard through the haze of memory, you'll recall a time when no one had never even heard of personal computers or game systems. Back then, you happily played with your TCR racetrack, used your television to watch *The Six Million Dollar Man,* and actually did your homework. That all changed in the late 1970s. Rather than asking for a brand new bike for Christmas, you begged and pleaded for an Atari. Soon, you were, like, a total dork if you didn't own at least a Texas Instruments computer in your home, and became the class stud if your parents brought home a ColecoVision. Let's rummage around the *Arcade Fever* attic and pull out the classic computers and home consoles that most influenced the world of video games:

Magnavox Odyssey (1972)

The ultra-primitive Magnavox Odyssey, released in the summer of 1972, was the home-video-game equivalent of Dana Carvey's Grumpy Old Man. Back in the Odyssey's day, players didn't get fancy gimmicks like computer scoring or graphics. They slapped plastic screen overlays on their TV sets and tallied points with their bare hands—and they liked it! As hilariously low-tech as it may sound by today's standards, Magnavox's groundbreaking analog-based system deservedly endowed fame unto designer Ralph Baer, who enthralled kids in 1978 with the *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*–inspired memory game Simon. The Odyssey also made viable the video-tennis theme that Atari subsequently cashed in on with its late-1972 release of Pong, and blazed a trail for the far, far, far superior home systems that would come later.

Apple II (1977)

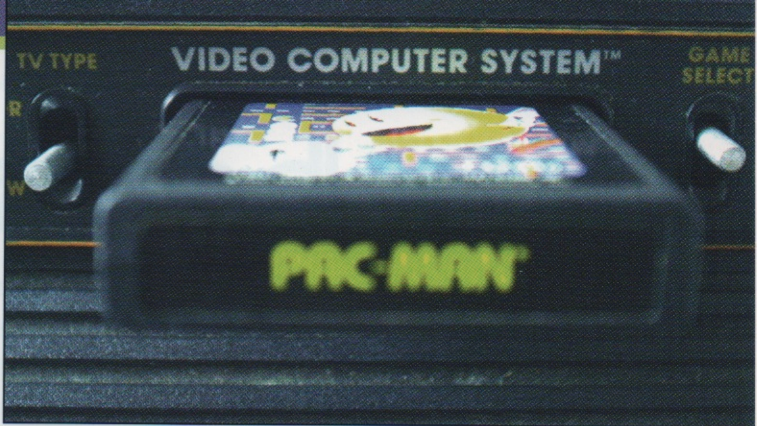
An Apple II sale a day kept bankruptcy lawyers away from former Atari employee Steve Jobs and programming partner Steve Wozniak after they debuted their user-friendly home computer in the spring of 1977. Over the next decade, amateur programmers went gonzo for the Apple II's built-in BASIC ability and the phrase "GO TO" moved past simple geekspeak. Hundreds of clever games—including the Zork series, Lode Runner, Sammy Lightfoot, Wizardry and Ultima—supported the system and its subsequent modifications, which included the problematic Apple II-plus and the affordable Apple IIe. Even the white-hot 1981 release of the IBM PC (best remembered for Microsoft's awesome flight simulator) couldn't sway the die-hards from their love of the Apple II: Savvy hacks knew that the IBM was personal computing's Empire to Apple's Rebel Alliance.

PAC-MAN
PITFALL!
BREAKOUT
DEFENDER

Atari VCS/2600 (1977)

Although it found some success with coin-operated titles and its home Pong console (1975), Atari didn't become a household name until distributor Sears started selling the Video Computer System, or VCS, for the 1977 Christmas season. And what a ho-ho-hopelessly awesome Christmas it was! As lame as its graphics were, the VCS (perhaps better known as the 2600) quickly became as familiar in basement rec rooms as shag carpeting and beanbags, and was America's toy of choice well into the 1980s. Manning the 2600's ingenious black joysticks and red fire buttons, millions of lucky brats loaded up on Cookie Crisp cereal and spent entire weekends experiencing the graphically challenged thrills of games

like Canyon Bomber, Adventure, Kaboom!, Superman, Spike's Peak, Barnstorming, Yars' Revenge and Pitfall!, to name just a few. As the 2600 phenomenon kicked into high gear circa 1982, Atari flooded Toys "R" Us with hundreds of cartridges (some coupled with DC's miniature Atari Force comic books), released the less-successful 5200 system and started advertising on Saturday morning television. By 1985, recovering addicts had stashed their consoles next to their decaying Rubik's Cubes, but the 2600's effect on the Atari Generation would last forever.



Intellivision (1980)

Its motto was "intelligent television," and Mattel's beautiful 1980 home system was certainly a brain cell or two ahead of its competition. Intellivision used erudite author George Plimpton as its spokesman, employed rudimentary voice synthesis and worked only on high-tech color TV sets (which at the time eliminated about half of the gaming public—duh!). Joystick-reliant Atari users loved to mock the brainy keypad and movement disc on Intellivision's controllers, into which you slid game-specific plastic overlays. But cerebral sports nuts were secure in their knowledge that Baseball was the best game ever created, and that off-roading in Auto Racing was as much fun as you could have on a television set.

Commodore 64 (1982)

One of the most-successful computers of all time, the noble-sounding Commodore 64 gave you a massive amount of bang for your $300. Not only could you learn to program on a system that cost about as much as an Intellivision, but its color monitor and spacious memory made for some tasty gaming. Titles like Avenger (a Space Invaders clone), and Decathalon (a take-off on Track and Field) looked far better than similar games ported to the Atari 2600 or Apple IIe. The best thing about the C-64—besides the fact that it made Texas Instruments' rival TI-99 computer (best game: Tunnels of Doom) look as primitive as the Speak and Spell—was that it helped personal computing remain affordable.

COLECOVISION
VIDEO GAME SYSTEM

ColecoVision (1982)

With its mushroom-like joysticks and superb graphical capabilities, ColecoVision blended the best qualities of the Atari 2600 and Intellivision to become the system to beat for reproducing the arcade experience at home. Coleco benefitted greatly from earning the exclusive right to manufacture the home version of Nintendo's Donkey Kong, and the monkey-infused cartridge was packaged with every single console (a marketing ploy that beat the tar out of Intellivision's free Las Vegas Blackjack and Poker). In fact, the bulk of ColecoVision's early titles were adaptations of memorable arcade titles; Venture, Mr. Do!, Lady Bug, Turbo and Space Fury were all superbly translated to the system. But there was nothing like ColecoVision Donkey Kong.

Nintendo Entertainment System (1985)

The Nintendo Entertainment System, or the NES, arguably did more to push arcades toward extinction than any other factor. Who wanted to leave the house when you could explore the seemingly limitless worlds of Super Mario Bros., solve The Legend of Zelda, or bash Mike Tyson's silly mug in the Punch-Out!! home game, all while wearing your underwear and munching on Funyons? The answer by the end of the 1980s was practically no one. And over 50 million NES owners couldn't have been wrong, could they?

fun house

The arcade didn't hog all the best games. Despite their graphical restrictions, a number of old-school home titles deserve to be placed among the classics. Here's a quick guide.

Adventure (1978)

The story sounds old now, but Adventure was mountain fresh back in 1978: As a block-shaped knight, scour castles and dungeons looking for keys and a magic chalice, while keeping a keen eye out for angry dragons (who hilariously resembled Ernie's "Rubber Ducky"). Another novel feature of the Atari 2600 classic resulted in the first video-game in-joke (better known as an "Easter egg"): If you found the hidden screen, you'd be "rewarded" with programmer Warren Robinett's self-congratulatory credit.

INTELLIVISION Intelligent Television
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL
by MATTEL ELECTRONICS
INTELLIVISION Intelligent Television
AUTO RACING
by MATTEL ELECTRONICS
FOR COLOR TV VIEWING ONLY

Major League Baseball (1979)

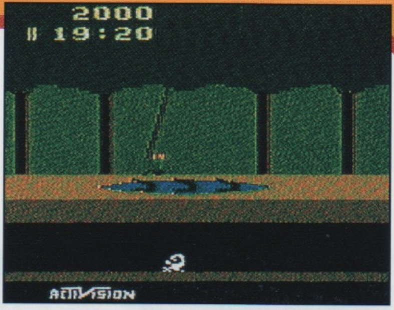
Its graphics would make you laugh today, but MLB was by far the best title created for the sports-savvy Intellivision system. Sure, there were no fly outs and the home runs seemed arbitrary. But the console's geeky keypad controllers were tailor-made for controlling the nine position players, and the game's noises (from the exciting hoots and hollers of the crowd to the umpire's "Yer Out!" bellow) almost made you feel like you were at the ballpark. The only thing missing was the Cracker Jack.

Zork (1980)

Text-based adventure games had been around since the early 1970s when simple logic programs called Hunt the Wumpus and Adventure (not to be confused with the Atari 2600 title above) became favorites of engineering majors. But the format didn't hit the big time until the release of Infocom's Zork, a game that required great imagination and perserverance to solve. You braved troll-filled rooms, jewelled-egg-stealing thieves and oceans of clever text to find 20 treasures; your most valuable weapon, besides the glowing elfin sword you picked up, was your ability to be patient with the standard Infocom language. (A sample exchange: You: "Get knife." Computer: "Which knife do you mean: The rusty knife or the nasty-looking knife?" You: "Screw you." Computer: "I see no screw here.") Infocom's other text-based games, including such gems as Planetfall and Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, were just as infuriatingly addictive.

Yars' Revenge (1981)

This Star Castle clone has to be the quintessential Atari 2600 title, and not just because of its deliciously geeky name. Yars' Revenge instantly garnered a huge cult following due to its intensely sci-fi storyline: You were a member of a proud race of mutated houseflies that had taken to space, and were seeking revenge on the hideous Qotile army that had set up camp on the right side of the screen. The comic book that came with the cartridge went into far greater detail, but suffice to say that Yar masters were no stranger to the neutral zone.



Pitfall! (1982)

Pitfall was to the Atari 2600 what Tetris was to the Nintendo Game Boy: It was the one game that everybody had. As the green-shirted explorer Pitfall Harry, you hopped crocodiles, logs and scorpions in search of diamond rings and other treasures. You could never quite get to the perfect score of 114,000 points, but that didn't stop you from trying so many times that your hand almost imploded from joystick overuse.

Miner 2049er (1982)

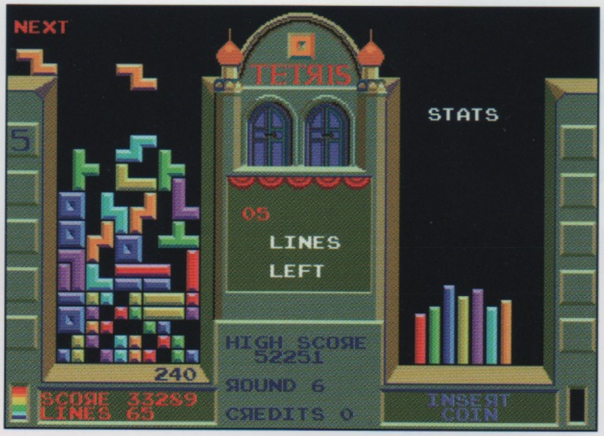
Whether you pronounced it "miner two-oh-forty-niner" or "miner twenty-forty-niner," this ubiquitous puzzler was a regular on virtually every home system and computer. A hybrid of Donkey Kong and Pac-Man, Miner 2049er put you in the wide-brimmed hat of Bounty Bob, a portly fellow who had the unenviable task of coloring in a series of hard-to-reach platforms while being chased by ugly mutants. When Bob died, his body disappeared in horrible fashion, leaving only his ridiculous hat.

Exodus: Ultima III (1983)

More than one D&D-style role-playing game materialized in the early 1980s bearing such titles as King's Quest, Rogue, Bard's Tale, Wizardry and Might and Magic. At the head of the class were the ingenious Ultima titles devised by the poncy Lord British (a.k.a Richard Garriott). Exodus, the third and best entry in the original trilogy, pitted as many as four randomly generated adventurers against the evil hordes plaguing Sosaria, a medieval world of great mystery. Incredibly addictive and a little bit scary, Ultima spawned sequel after sequel and the realm of Britannia (Sosaria's new name) is still flourishing on-line today. But whither the bobbits?

Lode Runner (1983)

Lode Runner was more fun than a bowl of Dig'em Smacks. And the Broderbund Software classic let you dig—a lot. Your stick-figure dude ran around 150 levels pushing dirt to trap other stick figures that guarded coveted gold bars, but the hard part was figuring out how to get at some of the booty. Solving certain higher levels sometimes took hours of experimentation because a gold bar might be sitting in a seemingly inaccessible area of the board. Brain teaser, thy name is Lode Runner!

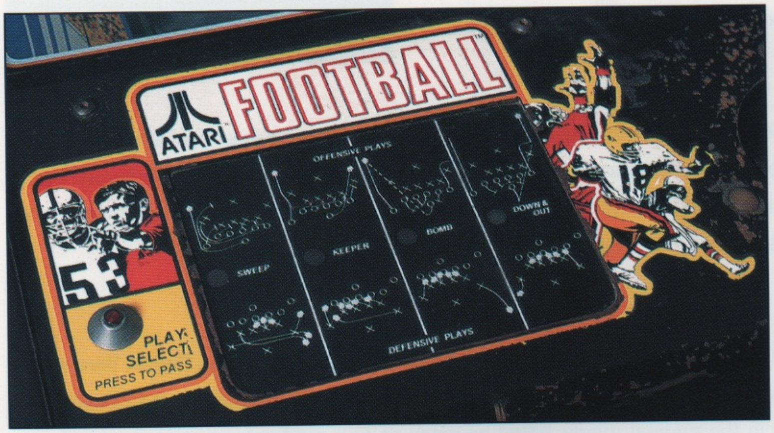


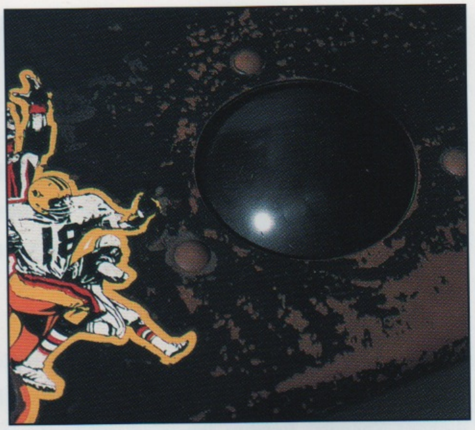
Tetris®; Elorg. 1987. All rights reserved.

Tetris (1985)

Although the universe's most addictive game didn't start plaguing American computers until 1986, it had swept through the Soviet Union a year earlier to stake its claim as an *Arcade Fever* fave. Tetris, with its immense crossover appeal, once again proved that a game didn't have to have advanced graphics to turn you into its slave. By the end of the decade (especially after Nintendo debuted its hand-held Game Boy and Atari released its colorful arcade Tetris, pictured at left, in 1989), the entire world was dreaming in those familiar geometric shapes, and dreading those tense final moments when the stacks of blocks got out of control. Fit, damn you! Fit!

Atari Football





So what if it was only slightly more realistic than matchbook football? Atari's hugely successful pigskin classic, which used simplistic Xs and Os as the offensive and defensive players, had more kick than Hall of Fame punter Ray Guy. Throughout the entire 1978 football season, thousands of armchair quarterbacks turned into tabletop quarterbacks to scrimmage their drinking buddies in the rough-and-tumble bar leagues. Winner buys next round.

Originally titled Xs and Os as conceived in 1973, Atari Football needed a few extra years for the technology to make sports games viable. The company finally developed the scrolling feature, which allowed the action to take place in a larger arena than could be pictured on the monitor. But much of the reason for the game's success was due to the newfangled Trak Ball, an optical device invented by Atari to produce an unlimited range of motion. You'd roll that thing for all it was worth to get your player safely downfield, and risked the very real threat of pinching the skin between your thumb and forefinger to do so. Ain't got time to bleed, sucker! For many players, the workout with the Trak Ball was the only exercise they ever got.

Each side could choose from four play options, and you definitely had your favorite. On offense, you could call the sweep, the keeper, the down-and-out pass and the bomb. Everybody loved the bomb, but the

1978

In headlines:
Two Popes die in two months; guru Jim Jones colony downs Kool-Aid

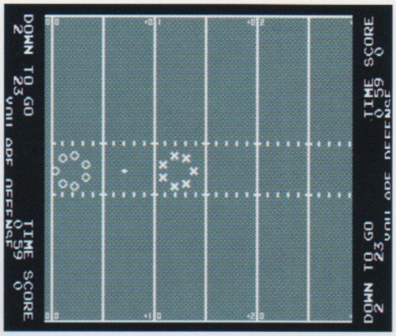
At theaters:
Squeaky *Grease* gets unreeled; *Superman* flies; *Animal House* uncages Bluto

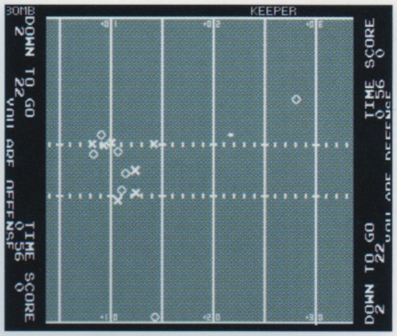
On TV:
Diff'rent Strokes packs Gary Coleman's pint-sized punch; *Saturday Night Live* struts Steve Martin's "King Tut"

In music:
Bee Gees utter unintelligibly in "Stayin' Alive": Van Halen volcano explodes with "Eruption"

Sports Nuts

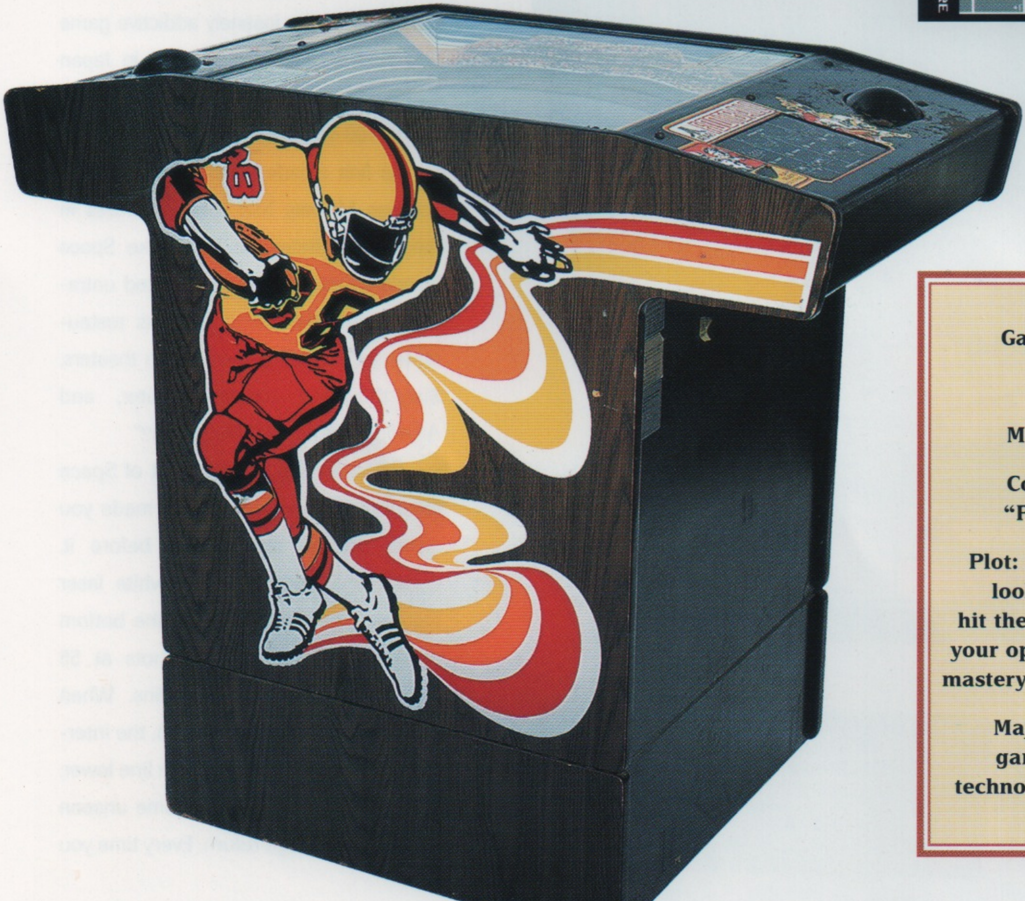
Using the same technology, Atari released Baseball, Basketball, and Soccer in 1979. None duplicated the success of its X and O predecessor. Atari also put out a four-player version of Football in 1979, updating the action to five plays and installing a second Trak Ball on each side of the table. Now you could roll to victory with a teammate.





yardage-gainer never worked because your opponent had sniffed it out. The best offensive weapon was a solid running game; it took guts to try and sneak your quarterback through a crack in the defensive line. Once you had your opponent off guard, you could chuck the occasional bomb for a quick touchdown. Six points!

Despite its novelty—and pretty much everything about the game was fresh in 1978—Atari Football's popularity faded quickly after the NFL Super Bowl. Perhaps it had something to do with the game's "head-to-head" set-up: There was only so much of your buddy's ugly mug you could stand to look at.



Game: Atari Football

Year: 1978

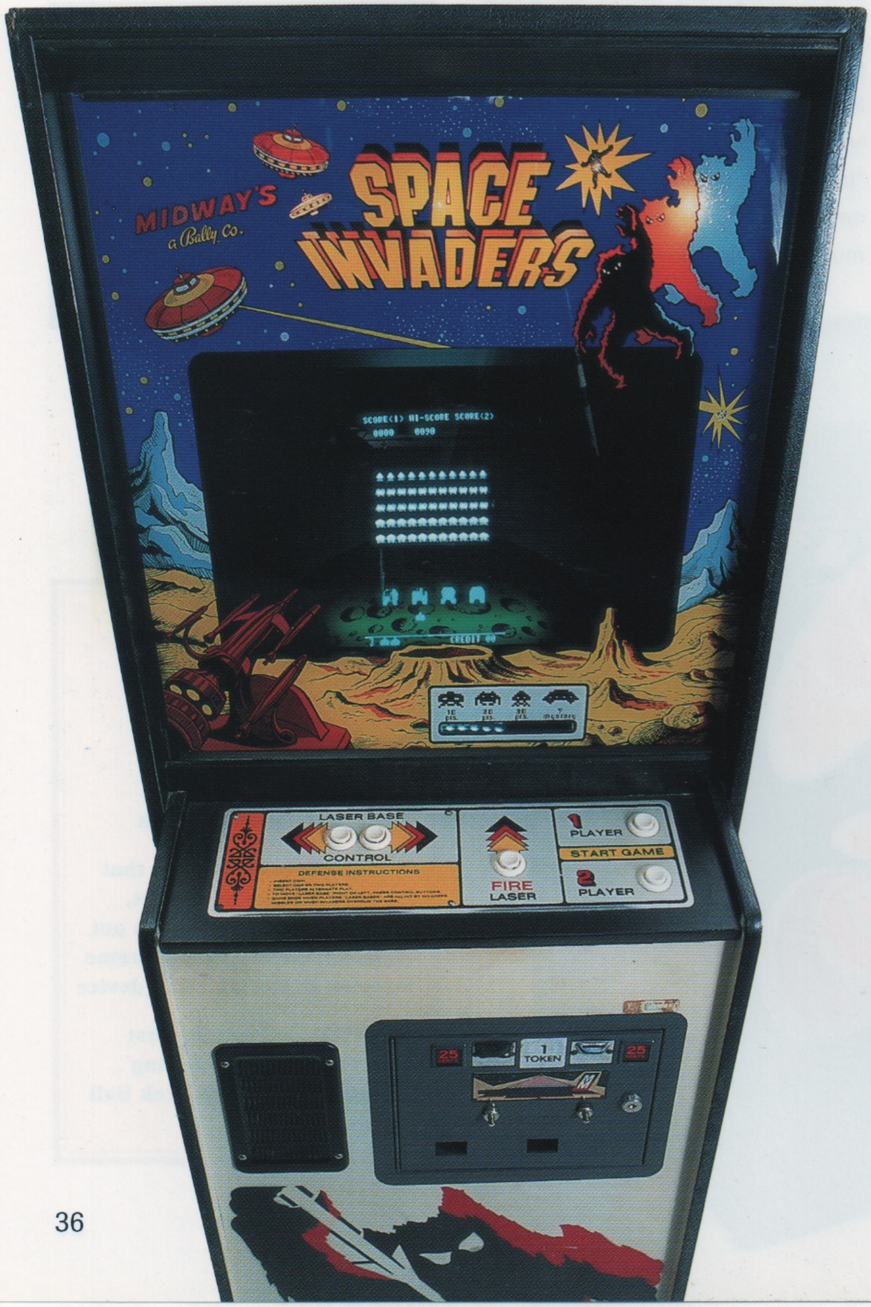
Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Trak Ball, "Play select" button

Plot: Manning players that looked like Xs and Os, hit the gridiron and shut out your opponent using supreme mastery of the Trak Ball device

Major milestone: First game to use scrolling technology and the Trak Ball

Space Invaders



"Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump." As ominous as the bloodthirsty shark in *Jaws*, the aliens approached from the sky. Lower and lower toward your feeble-looking "laser base" they descended, their death march reaching a fever pitch. "Thumpthumpthump-thump... Thumpthumpthumpthump..." The plodding swarm totally stressed you out, but you needed courage under fire if you wanted to achieve glory on Midway's 1978 masterpiece Space Invaders. And who the heck didn't?

The spark that ignited the video-game explosion, start with this, the original space shoot-'em-up. Created by Japanese upstart Taito, the insanely addictive game was such an immediate smash in Japan that it was suspected of causing a shortage in 100-yen coins (although this could be the first arcade urban legend). Lucky licensee Midway had similar success in the United States, as locust-like Space Invaders cabinets quickly infested untraditional establishments such as restaurants, supermarkets, and movie theaters. Sixty-thousand machines later, and America was saying "Pong who?"

The crowning achievement of Space Invaders was arguably that it made you sweat like no other game before it. Armed only with a simple white laser cannon, you scrolled across the bottom of the screen taking pot shots at 55 deceptively cute space cretins. When they hit the edge of the screen, the interstellar creeps would move one line lower, as if forced downward by some unseen typewriter carriage return. Every time you picked one off—your cannon going "tssss-tssss-tssss"—the formation would speed up ever more slightly. Pretty soon they were zooming across the sky, and you had to time your shots perfectly or they'd land on the ground. Game over.

Nothing in the arcade had ever been more nerve-wracking than peeking your gun out from behind one of your four degradable shields to fire off a quick volley at the dangerously low enemy above you. You shot, he shot, quickest shot wins. It was like a showdown in the Wild West, only far more interesting because this involved space aliens. Space aliens were cool.

They were everywhere, too, even off-screen. The sides of the hefty cabinet depicted big space goons in the act of hurling missiles in screaming bicentennial-style red, white and blue. The translucent glass screen gave you beautiful renderings of flying saucers, more freaks and a planetary scene straight out of *Lost in Space*. The marquee boldly announced "Space Invaders" in kitschy red and yellow, a sort of a mixture between a 1950s pinball game and a Marvel comic. It felt like an adventure just inserting a quarter, and the adventure was shared by millions.

Get High

Space Invaders established the concept of the high score. Now you really had something to shoot for, even if you couldn't prove anything. The game's "Hi-Score" feature couldn't take a player's initials.

Quarter Pounder Deluxe

Deluxe Space Invaders landed in 1979. Titled Space Invaders Part II in Japan, the game replicated the frenzy of the original but didn't bring much novelty to the arcade. Kudos, however, to Taito for one innovation: The sequel featured funny little intermission scenes between levels (a precursor to the breaks in Pac-Man), in which the last invader you shot would limp off screen. Also, if the last alien you shot on a particular level was one from the bottom row, you were rewarded with a cool blast of fireworks.

Game: Space Invaders

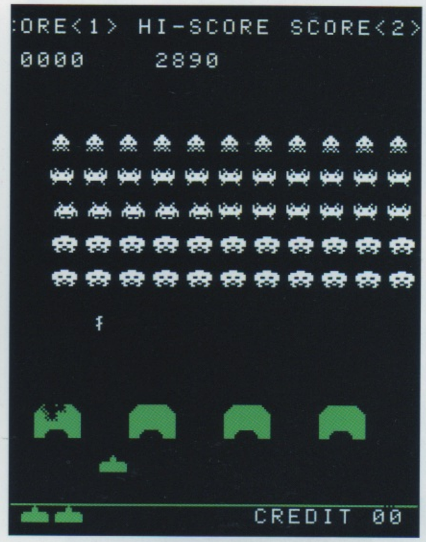
Year: 1978

Manufacturer: Midway

Distinguishing features: Right and left buttons, fire button

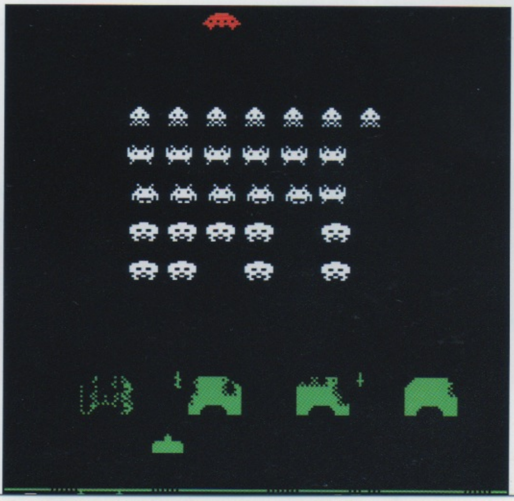
Plot: Use your laser base to pick off quickly advancing alien marauders

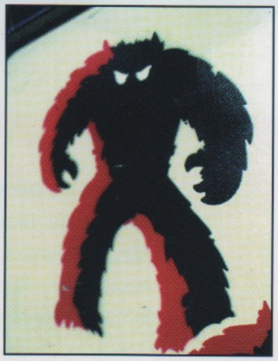
Major milestone: The first blockbuster video game



Trouble in Texas

Space Invaders mania got so insidious in 1979 that chuckleheads in Mesquite, Texas, took a case to the State Supreme Court that would have banned the infernal machines from establishments around the conservative town. Like Kevin Bacon in the classic film *Footloose,* youth won out and kids continued to kick off their Sunday shoes and cut loose on the game.





Asteroids

If Pong was heavy petting and Space Invaders was getting to third base, then Asteroids was the lucky arcade game that sealed the deal with the video-gaming masses. America's love affair with the 1979 Atari shoot-'em-up, which was the final Atari release of the Me Decade and easily their greatest, bordered on obsessive. Years of therapy wouldn't wean you off this addictive relationship.

Quite simply, Asteroids rocked, hard-style. It sported slick black-and-white vector graphics, previously used by Atari in its failed flight simulation game Lunar Lander. Unlike Space Invaders, you weren't stuck on the ground. Your ship, a simple isosceles triangle, zipped around the screen if you so desired, and even breathed fire out of its rear end when you pressed the thrust button. Sweet!

Most importantly, though, the game appealed to the Fred Flintstone in everyone: Like a space-age quarry worker, you chipped away at floating space stones. But it was a perilous endeavor, because the asteroids randomly broke into smaller rocks, the trajectory and speed of which were impossible to predict. If you shot a big boulder at close range, you were in great danger of being pulverized by its wayward descendants. Yabba-dabba-don't!

After you'd split apart all the easy-to-hit big-and-medium-sized asteroids, innumerable pesky little buggers, barely bigger than the blip-sized laser pellets that pew-pew-pewed from your ship, flew wildly around the screen. It took incredible precision to nail them, and Job levels of patience. More often than not you'd be forced to scramble out of the protective pocket (i.e. the center of the screen), like a quarterback with a weak offensive line.

Making matters worse, two styles of hostile alien saucers regularly turned up and used you for target practice. The bigger UFOs, which shot in random directions and often ran into an asteroid before you could shoot them, posed little threat (and netted a mere 200 points). But those gnat-like micro-saucers had deadly aim. There was nowhere to run, of course; if you thrust over one edge of the screen, you'd simply appear back on the

1979

In headlines:
Three Mile Island
leaks nuke juice;
Magic Johnson
cooks Larry Bird
in college basketball

At theaters:
The Deer Hunter blows
away Oscar voters;
Alien eats up sci-fi fans

On TV:
Southern fried cheese
on *The Dukes of Hazzard;*
Twiki makes "beedy,
beedy, beedy" a *Buck
Rogers* catch phrase

In music:
Village People unveil
difficult *Y.M.C.A.* dance;
My Sharona makes
stuttering hip; *Rapper's
Delight* kicks it old school

Game: Asteroids

Year: 1979

Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Two rotate buttons, fire button, thrust button, hyperspace button

Plot: Pilot your triangular ship around an over-crowded asteroid field and blast anything that moves, especially angry flying saucers

Major milestone: First game to allow players to input initials into a high-score table

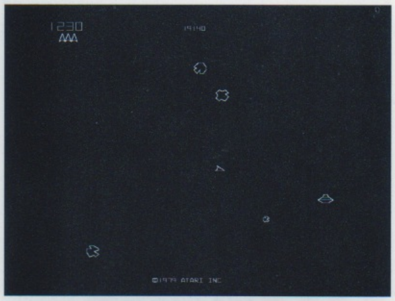
exact opposite side. So you'd instead launch a quick volley and pray that the bastard's first few shots missed the mark. They never seemed to.

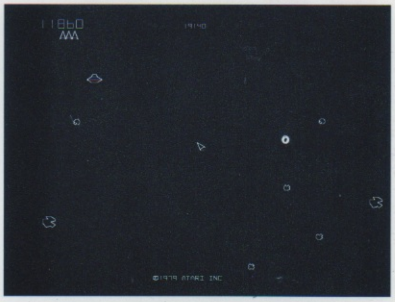
Sometimes you'd just slam your hand down on the hyperspace button in futility, utilizing the revolutionary feature that jumped your ship to a random spot on the board and hopefully out of harm's way. But the cowardly act carried an unwritten rule: Hyperspace overuse was for losers. And losers played with Pet Rocks, not floating rocks.

Lunar Modules

Due to stunning initial orders, the first 200 Asteroids were shipped in cabinets featuring artwork from the groundbreaking 1979 vector graphics flop Lunar Lander. The underrated predecessor sold only 1,500 units, but should always be remembered as the world's first visual flight simulator.

Atari manufactured over 70,000 Asteroids machines, earning a place as the company's most successful game and the industry's third best-selling title of all time. Not bad for a game that essentially consisted of a few white lines.





Spaced Out

In 1981, Atari released Asteroids Deluxe. The gameplay was essentially the same, except that you could now summon a protective shield around your ship And you needed it! The game was way too hard, and got overshadowed by a friendlier generation of games, including Ms. Pac-Man, Donkey Kong and Frogger.

Score Tactic

Until the bug was fixed in later editions, savvy Asteroids players discovered a safe haven in, of all places, the scoring field at the top of the screen. There the rocks wouldn't hit you and you could sit and fire at UFOs in relative peace. It's called cheating, retards!

AYER
RT
NS: INSERT COINS · SELECT 1 C
HYPER SPACE
ROTATE RIGHT
T

Game: Galaxian

Year: 1979

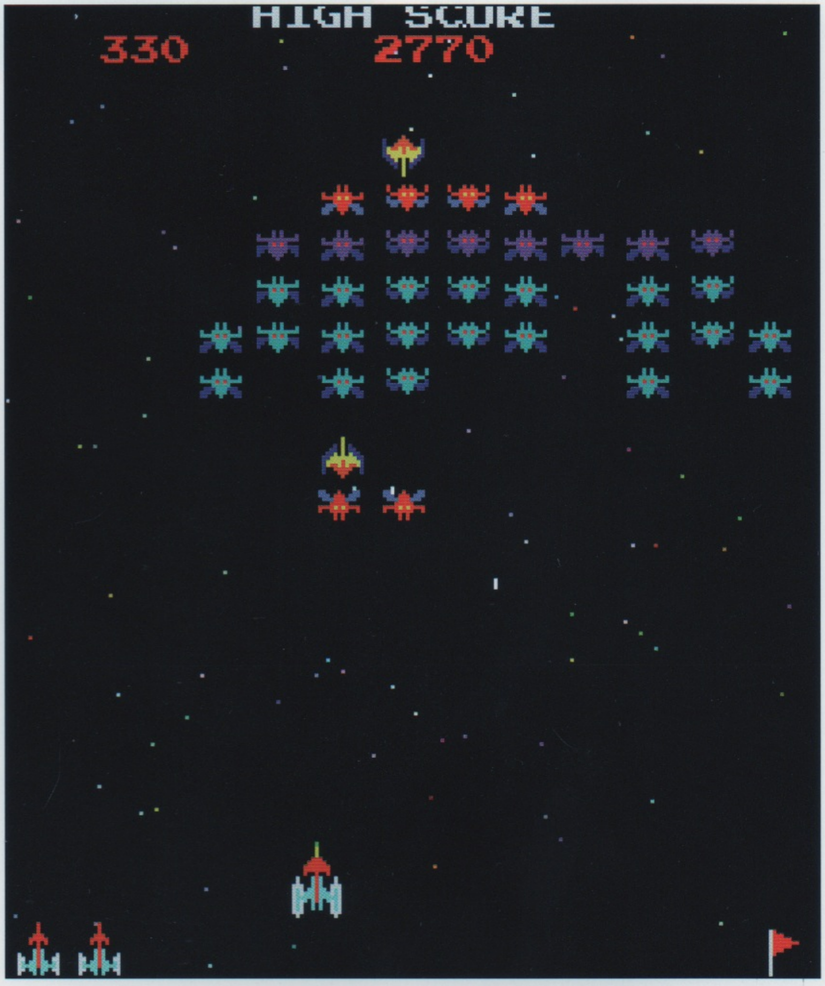
Manufacturer: Midway

Controls: Two-direction joystick, fire button

Plot: Eliminate the throbbing, swarming fighters of the hostile Galaxian convoy

Major milestone: First video game with a full-color monitor

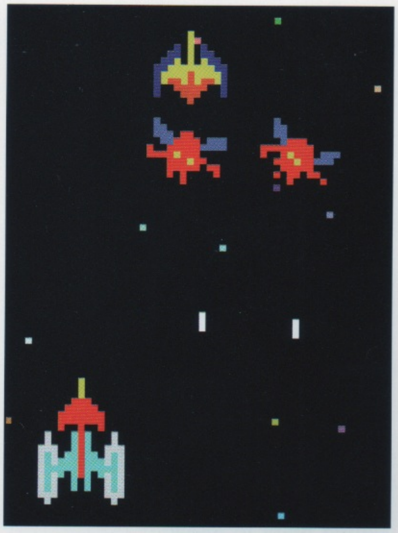
Galaxian



Whatever else the insectoid outer space critters of Midway's Galaxian might have been, they definitely weren't shy. They flew right up to you, extended an evil wing and—this being before the dawn of voice synthesis—typed out a message that read: "We are the Galaxians." Like, who asked? It was just this style of intergalactic gumption that made people take notice of the Midway classic and put the Galaxian convoy at the top of the list of most contentious video-game villains.

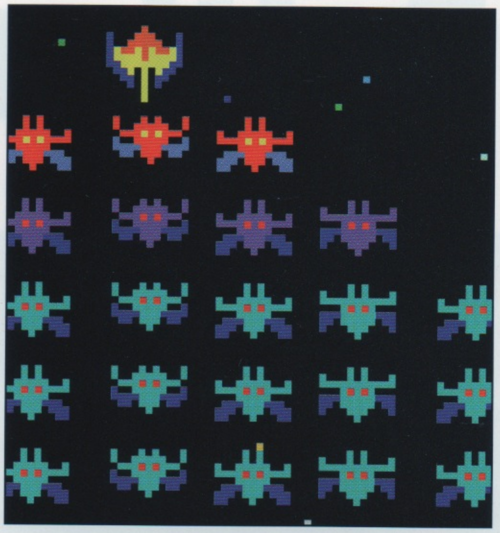
At first glance, the neatly assembled enemy swarm indicated that the game was yet another Space Invaders clone—albeit a brightly colored one. But these puppies flew! You could pick them off easily when they were huddled in their convoy above, but individual Galaxians soon broke ranks and swooped down, guns a-blazin', toward your clunky pea shooter. And even though they couldn't talk, per se, they sure did scream bloody murder as they made their attack run. As the levels progressed, the skies bled flying freaks and the entire arcade rang out Galaxian's unholy racket. God, it was beautiful.

With the game, Midway introduced the arcade to the wonderful world of color television. And not just fake color, either: Until that point, diversity of palette had been



Art Nouveau

Foreshadowing the awesome Centipede cabinet two years hence, the artwork on the sides of Galaxian summed up the gaming experience nicely by depicting a dragonfly insectoid bearing down on a feeble space craft. It ought to be in the Louvre.



achieved by placing overlays in strategic locations on top of black-and-white monitors (e.g. the green field of Space Invaders). Now when you watched the cool yellow, red and blue flagship Galaxians charging toward your ship, the kamikazes were actually yellow, red and blue the whole way down.

To give proper credit, Midway licensed the game and the vivacious technology from the soon-to-be powerhouse Japanese design firm Namco. The two companies quickly forged a beautiful relationship, reteaming the following year to unleash Pac-Man on the unsuspecting public. With their first team-up on Galaxian, the tandem not only poured fuel on the Carter era's obsession with space-themed entertainment, but also rocketed arcades light years ahead—or at least into the 1980s.

Flagship Model

The signature Galaxian flagships (the yellow, red and blue chargers that were flanked by the red aliens on attack runs) became true celebrities at the arcade. The tricolored pests made cameos in a handful of other Namco-approved games, including the following notable instances:

Pac-Man (1980)

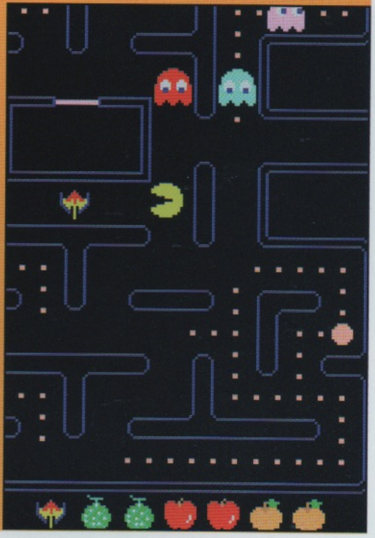
On levels nine and ten, the flagship popped up as a tasty snack for the main muncher. Talk about indigestion.

Galaga (1981)

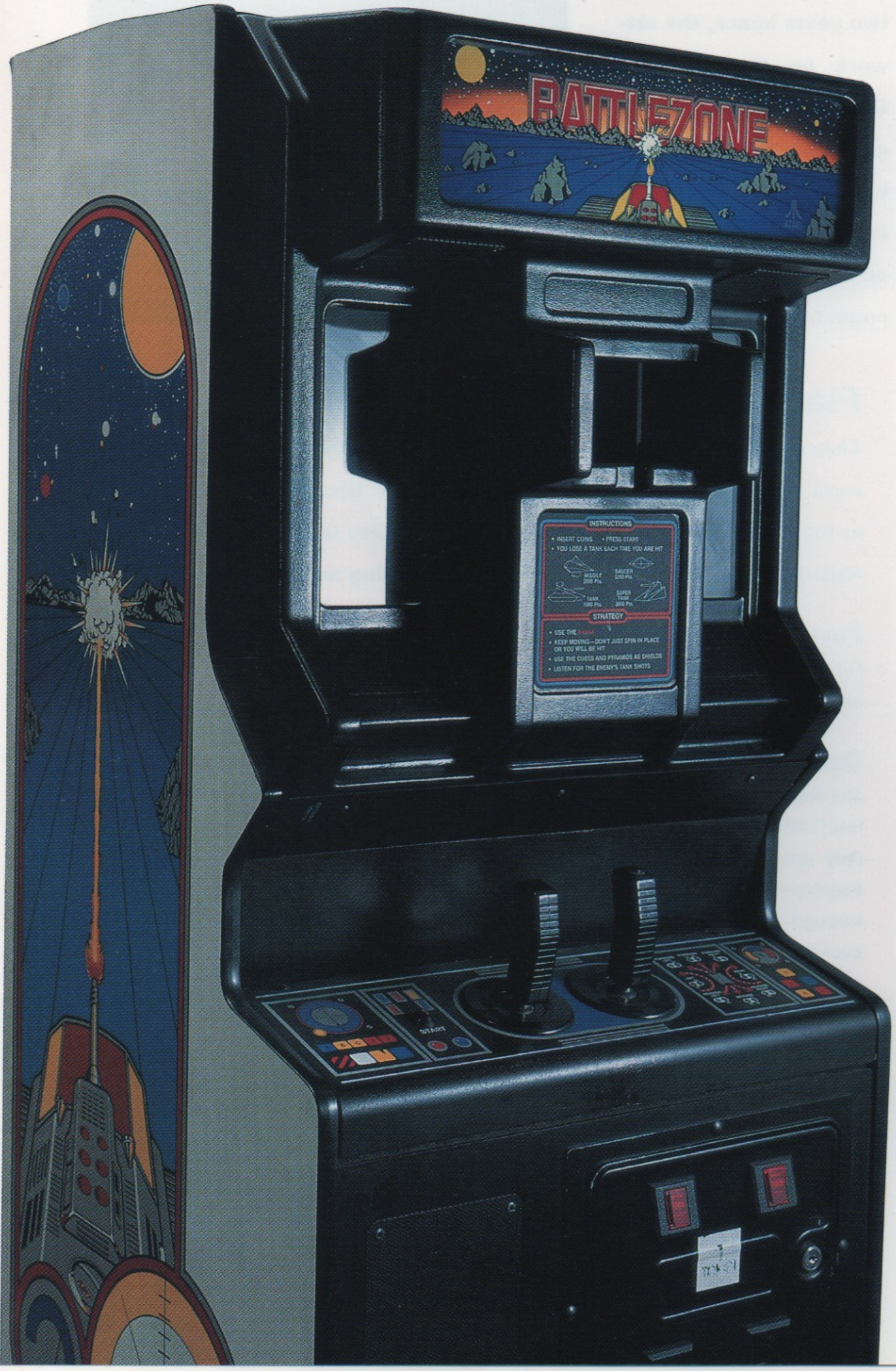
The rockin' follow-up to Galaxian had only one holdover from the original, and you can only guess who it was. The fan-shaped flagship came out of nowhere on levels 12 through 14 after being transformed from a bee-shaped alien.

Gorf (1981)

On "Galaxians," the third level of this Midway-designed release, the camera-hogging insectoid stood in formation and screamed down at you. Seemed like old times.



Battlezone



An arcade rat like yourself didn't pass military muster, that's for sure. You were too weak, too pale. Yet Atari, with its deliciously different 1980 release Battlezone, assigned you to tank detail and let you blast away at everything that moved. You didn't even have to sweat through basic training first. If Uncle Sam made recruiting this much fun, everyone would want to enlist.

Battlezone, with its beeping radar and three-dimensional vector graphics, was as realistic an experience you could get in 1980. The game's unique first-person perspective made you feel like you were actually looking through the scopes of a military-issue tank on rounds in a hostile environment. If only you were tall enough to look through the view finder.

Game: Battlezone

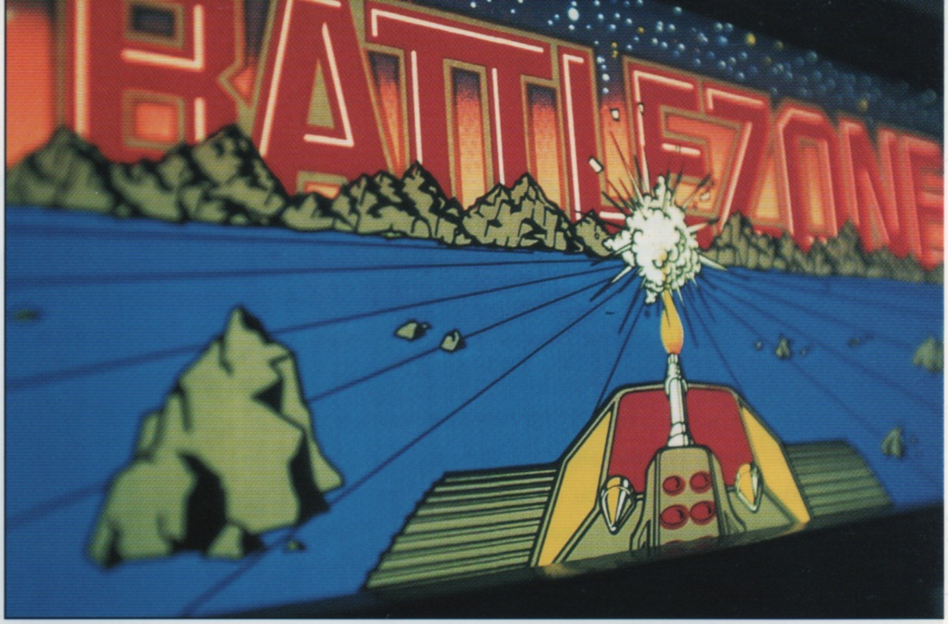
Year: 1980

Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Two two-direction joysticks, fire button

Plot: Look through the scopes of your tank and blast the bejeezus out of enemy Panzers and UFOs

Major milestone: First game with a first-person perspective



Tanks, Dude!

Although Battlezone was truly a group effort, primary credit for the landmark game goes to Atari programmer Ed Rotberg.

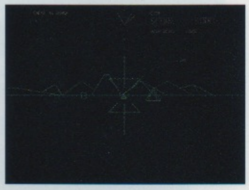
As you cruised the bizarre planet surface, which was littered with geometric blockades, you frequently encountered pesky enemy tanks. The radar would flare up—ENEMY TO LEFT—and you'd desperately slam the joysticks in tandem to get the thing in your sights. Usually, they'd already taken an errant practice shot at you, so you were forced to lock on target immediately and open fire. If your missile did its job, the rival tank would explode and you'd move on to the next tête-à-tête; if you got reamed, the entire screen would crack up and the machine would rumble in its death throes.

You were obviously trolling an otherworldly arena because spinning UFOs would occasionally scurry by. You could train your gun on them for bonus points, but this endeavor left you wide open to attack from the unsportsmanlike enemy tanks. In the rare moments when there was nothing on your radar, you just tooled around and took in the view. A crescent-shaped moon shining down from above, the simulated landscape had an almost trance-inducing quality to it. You badly wanted to explore that spewing volcano off in the distance, but you could never quite seem to get there. But then you snapped out of it: This was Battlezone, not Touristzone.

In the end, the beautiful game always schooled you. There were too many enemy tanks, and your darn vehicle just wasn't quick enough to handle all of them. Maybe basic training would have helped, after all.

Be All That You Can Be

Believe it or not, Atari temporarily became a lackey for Uncle Sam. After the impressive debut of Battlezone in late 1980, a group of retired U.S. Army honchos contacted Atari to request that they modify the game as a simulator for top-secret training purposes, and the premier video-game company ended up producing a prototype that approximated the action of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle. The cool control yoke later used in Star Wars made its debut with the simulator, and many other modifications were made: Trainees had to choose from a variety of weapons (e.g. machine gun, cannon, missile launcher), calibrate them correctly, and take out enemy tanks and helicopters without killing civilians.



1980	In headlines:	At theaters:	On TV:	In music:
	Iran holds America hostage all year; Mount Saint Helens blows its top	First *Caddyshack* line quoted; *Friday the 13th* makes hockey masks trendy	Question of the year: "Who Shot J.R.?"; U.S. hockey team tells U.S.S.R. to get the puck outta here	"Tom Sawyer" makes Rush immortal; cruel bullet proves John Lennon isn't mortal

berzerk

You were most likely heading into a sucky arcade if the "Intruder alert! Intruder alert!" of Berzerk didn't rudely greet you at the door. Video-gamedom's first catch phrase, emanating from those lame-brain robots pursuing your character in the 1980 Stern classic, proved an irresistible invitation to players forever looking for the next stop on the coin-op food chain.

At the very least, Berzerk certainly pushed the limits of existing voice-synthesizer technology. The robots, besides packing maddeningly accurate lasers, wielded a vocabulary of a whopping 31 words, each carefully selected to induce the proper amounts of panic, shame and anger. Did those metallic lunkheads really just call you a humanoid? Did they actually gloat after shooting you? And no stinking computer-generated goon was going to call you a chicken and get away with it. The fact that the robots sounded exactly like the cool Cylons from the TV show *Battlestar Galactica* only prompted more quarter-popping from geeked-up kids everywhere.

STERN
BERZERK
FIRE
FIRE

Besides the prickly dialogue, however, Berzerk was as emotionless as the floating rocks in Asteroids. The faceless robots were alarmingly dim-witted, frequently running into walls and blasting one another. The brightly colored but sparsely decorated maze was devoid of any creature comforts like hidey holes or fruit. And the smiley-faced killing machine Evil Otto, whose rhythmically bouncing presence compelled a player to bolt in fear to a different screen, was basically the video-game equivalent of *Friday the 13th's* impassive Jason. You were scared as hell of him, sure, and you suspected that his grinning facade, like Jason's hockey mask, disguised something very hideous beneath. But who was Otto? Why was he so darn evil? What exactly was his beef?

Game: Berzerk

Year: 1980

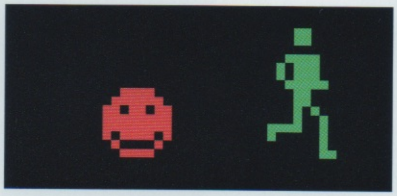
Manufacturer: Stern

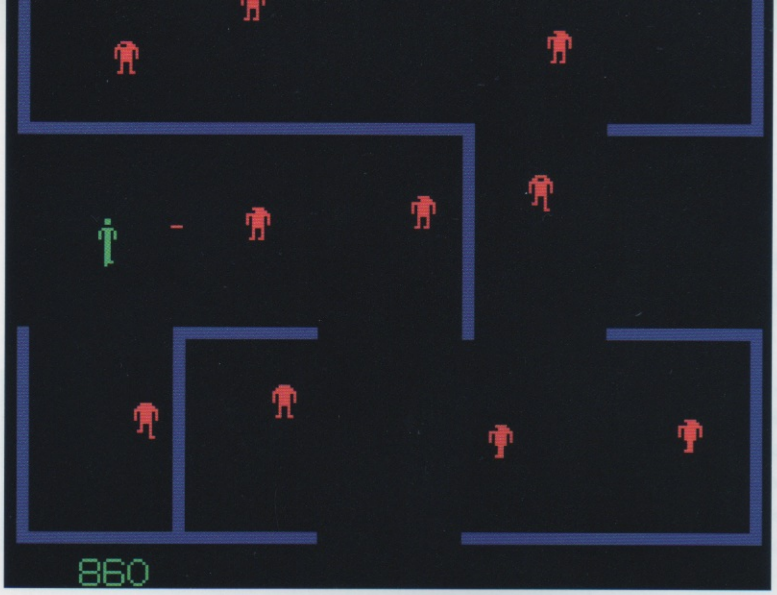
Controls: Eight-direction joystick, fire button

Plot: Navigate a laser-toting stick figure through an endless series of mazes while avoiding trash-talking robots and the indestructible happy fun ball Evil Otto

Major milestone: First successful voice-synthesizer game

Despite its drawbacks—which also included clumsy controls permitting you to shoot only in the direction you were running—Berzerk sold a respectable 25,000 units and deservedly belongs in the upper echelon of classic games. Not only did it make voice synthesis relevant in the industry, but it paved the way for more advanced hunt-and-shoot dungeon games beginning with Robotron: 2084 and Gauntlet and continuing on down the line to Doom and Quake. And, let's face it, "Intruder alert! Intruder alert!" is still refreshing to hear more than two decades later.





The Berzerk Lexicon

"Coin detected in pocket!"

"Intruder alert! Intruder alert!"

"Stop the intruder!"

"Kill the humanoid! Kill the intruder!"

"Shoot the humanoid!"

"The humanoid must not escape!"

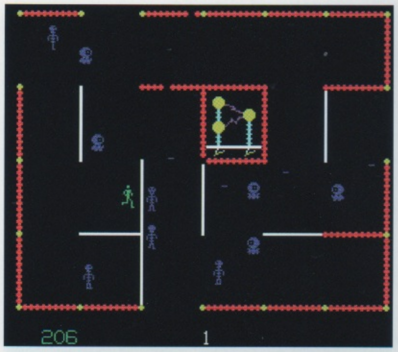
"Destroy the humanoid!"

"Chicken! Fight like a robot!"

"Got the humanoid! Got the intruder!"

Berzerk is the first video game to be linked to the death of a person. On April 3, 1982, an 18-year-old gamer named Peter Burkowski collapsed at Friar Tuck's Game Room in Calumet City, IL, after playing Berzerk for fifteen minutes. The coroner's report named heart attack as the official cause of death, but also suggested that video games might have been the catalyst. At least Burkowski may have died happy: He held the two top scores on the game.

BERZERK
STERN



Feeding Frenzy

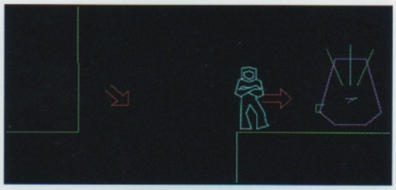
Berzerk's 1982 sequel, Frenzy, improved upon the original's bland game play by adding walls that reflected laser fire, proposing simple tasks to complete (such as destroying a nuclear reactor) and rendering Otto briefly fallible with three well-placed shots.

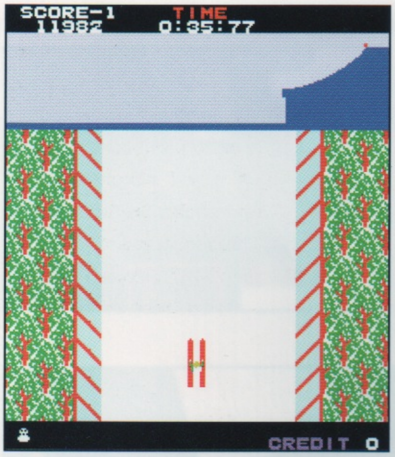
Honorable Mentions

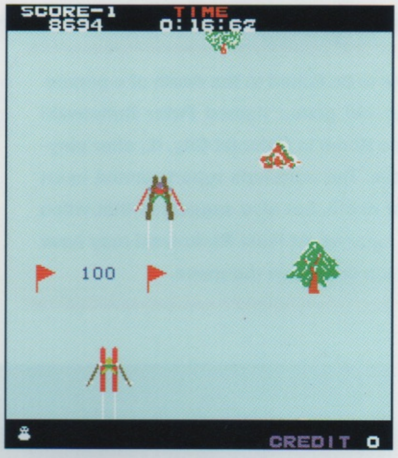
Some releases, no matter how strong, just didn't quite make it into the video-game vernacular. *Arcade Fever* wouldn't be complete without giving a shout-out to the following near-misses:

The Adventures of Major Havoc (Atari, 1983)

Besides featuring a hugely cool horizontally spinning controller, Major Havoc provided thrills via its tasty plot: As a cloned fighter in a distant century, you must cleanse robot-filled space stations and get the heck out of there before their reactors blow up. The minutely detailed vector graphics even captured the tapping of Havoc's impatient foot if you dawdled too long in one particular spot. A major blast.





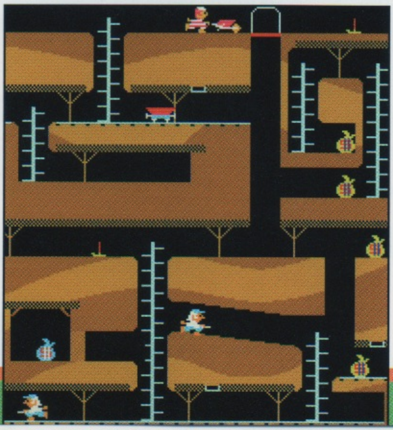


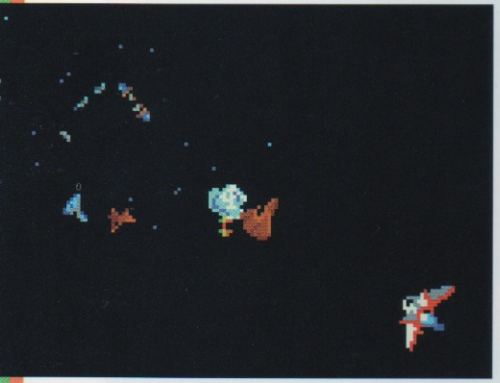
Alpine Ski (Taito, 1981)

Paging Suzy Chapstick. In this primitive Taito sports game, you shooshed down a slope past aspens and slalom poles. The real test, however, came with the ski jump bonus round in which you tasted either the thrill of victory or, more likely, the agony of defeat.

Bagman (Stern, 1983)

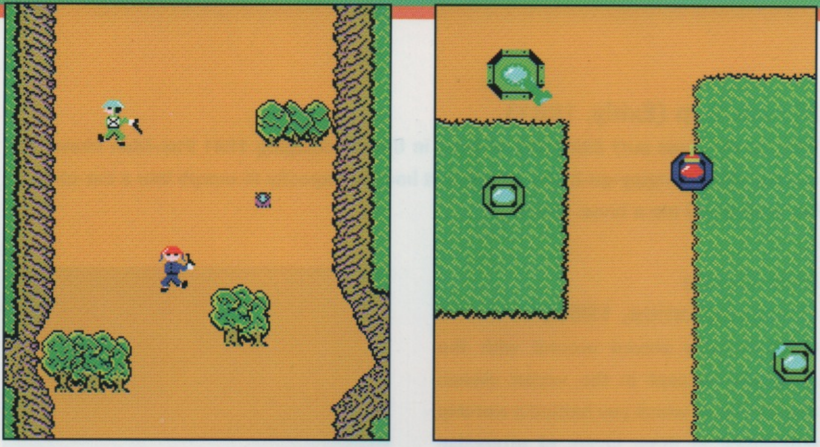
Known as "Le Bagnard" in its native France, the Stern import Bagman asked you to don a striped convict's uniform and collect bags of gold from an abandoned mine. The bad news: Two old coot sheriffs frequently harassed you. The good news: You could kill them with a pick-axe. Even better, the action took place over three sprawling boards, which made for some seriously long games. You got your quarter's worth with Bagman.





Gyruss (Konami, 1983)

Concocted by the same Konami designer who did Time Pilot, the beautiful space-shooter Gyruss almost blasted off into the arcade superstrata. Sure, the Challenging Stages screamed Galaga, but these battles took place right in our backyard: Your ship, which spun around the entire board in a circular pattern, was trying to find its way back to Earth from cold planet Neptune, all while kicking out a rad Bach-composed jam.



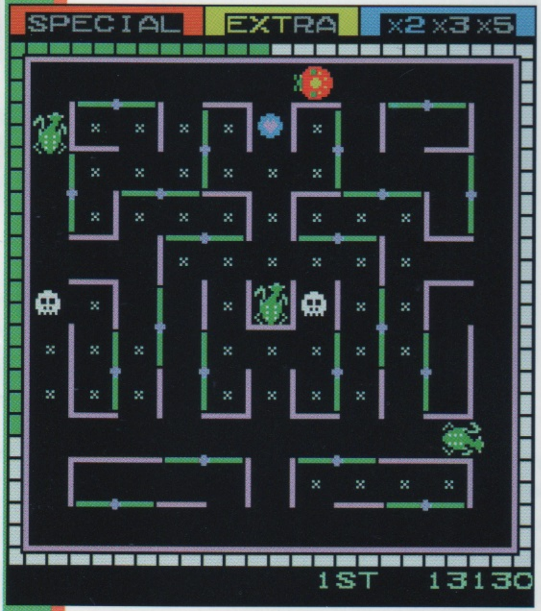
Front Line (Taito, 1982)

Another graphically challenged entry from the makers of Elevator Action, Taito's Front Line was one of the first successful war games. You controlled a dopey World War–II era soldier (stupidly wearing an X target on his back) armed to the teeth with grenades, which he hurled awkwardly at a never-ending stream of bad guys. He also could hop into various tanks and blast enemy vehicles, and this bitchin' feature made Front Line a brief favorite of game hogs everywhere.

I, ROBOT
ATARI
I, ROBOT

I, Robot (Atari, 1983)

Given that it was the first game to employ now-ubiquitous 3D polygon graphics, I, Robot may have been the most influential title of the 1980s. But it also rocked: You controlled "Unhappy Interface Robot #1984," a disgruntled automaton rebelling from "Big Brother" simply because he likes to jump and Big Brother doesn't allow jumping. Bonus: A practice mode, entitled "Doodle City," allowed you to draw colorful patterns. Beat the heck out of a Spirograph.

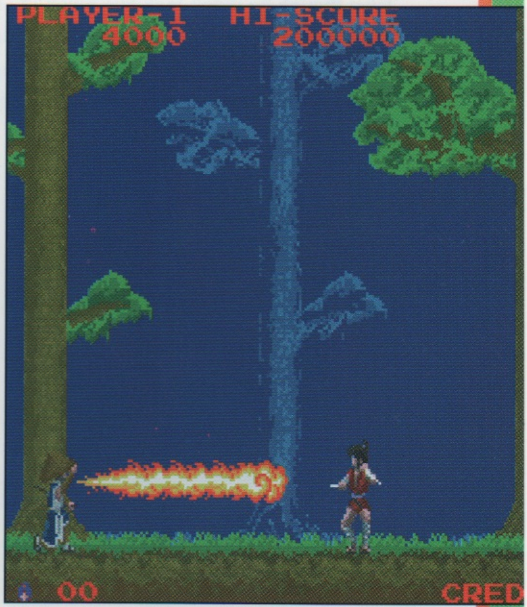


Lady Bug (Universal, 1981)

Arguably the strongest of all Pac-Man clones, the Kafkaesque Lady Bug turned you into an insect and doomed you to scarf up pellets repeatedly. But the Universal game promoted literacy: You could spell "Special" and "Extra" to earn bonuses.

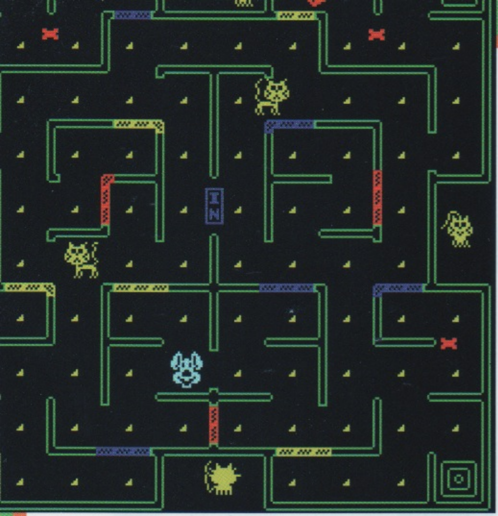
Legend of Kage (Taito, 1984)

In this kick-ass side-scrolling fighting game, you played the chopsocky titular hero, who forever smacked around evil ninja and firebreathing sensei in his quest to save a shanghaied princess. The energetic background music provided the adrenaline rush required to pull off Kage's gravity defying moves and throwing-star prowess.



Looping (Venture Line, 1982)

This flying game from the ultra-obscure Venture Line was refreshingly oddball. You had to navigate your plane past hot air balloons, into winding tunnels made of pipes, and through sharp-shooting puzzles. But the joystick was counterintuitive: To move your plane downward, you pushed up; to go up, you pulled down. "Loopy" may have been a more appropriate title.

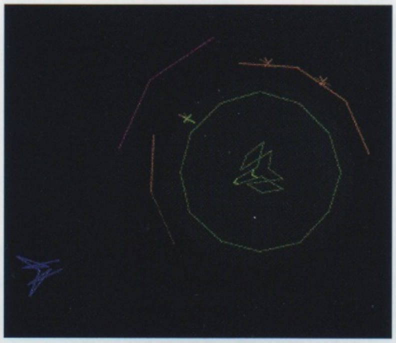


Mouse Trap (Exidy, 1981)

Who let the dogs out? Exidy did, at least in this challenging 1981 Pac-Man clone. You started off as a happy-go-lucky mouse, but had the capacity to morph into a cat-chomping mutt if you ate a bone. Woof!

Star Castle (Cinematronics, 1980)

Cinematronics played around with the Asteroids concept in the vector classic Star Castle, in which you battled a warship ensconced in three layers of protective shielding. There was no castle in sight.



Stunt Cycle (Atari, 1976)

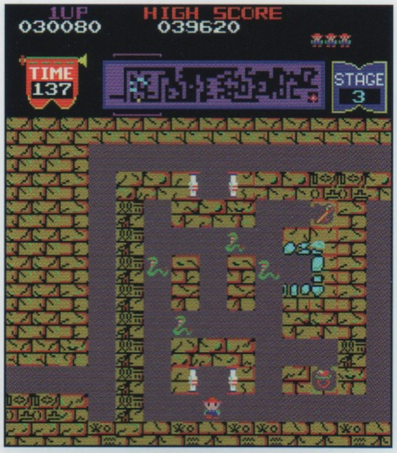
Like Fonzie hopping over 14 barrels outside Arnold's Drive-In, this Atari relic let you test your courage by jumping over stuff on a custom-built hog. Complete mastery of the handlebar controls was required in order to escape a massive wipeout—and to get all the chicks. Ayyyy!

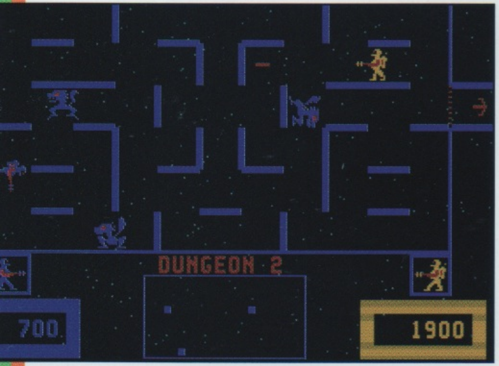
SubRoc-3D (Sega, 1982)

It was "Battlezone with submarines," and that alone was enough to get people to try SubRoc-3D. The funky, three-dimensional graphics took some getting used to, but Sega's superb sea battle had arcade-goers yelling "Torpedoes away!"

Tutankham (Konami, 1982)

Even though he didn't look like much of an adventurer, the little dude you controlled in this Konami treasure-hunt extravaganza had Indiana Jones–sized cojones. With the help of a map inset and two joysticks, you scoured King Tut's tomb for relics and keys while blasting away at poorly drawn critters. Tutankham's curse: The game was harder to learn than hieroglyphics.



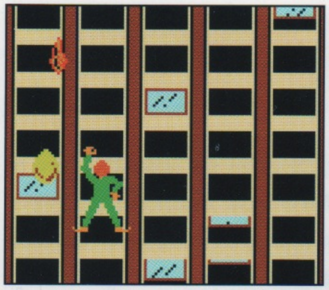


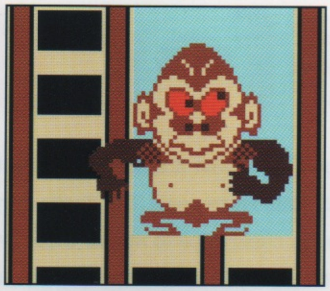
Wizard of Wor (Midway, 1981)

Whether by design or not, this otherworldly labyrinth duel made for the ultimate pizza-parlor game. Its full potential could only reached in two-player mode, when you got to prowl a maze teeming with Worlucks and other bizarre minions of the titular sorcerer either in coordination with or against a friend. Pizza parlor law required you to opt for the latter.

Xevious (Atari, 1982)

In this vertically scrolling Atari hootenanny, you piloted a fighter plane over the surface of the Earth to take out the strongholds and missile silos of the nefarious Xevious race, the original inhabitants of the planet. Could *The X-Files* stand for *The Xevious Files*?





Crazy Climber

If you build it, he will climb...

That tagline could easily have applied to this unique 1980 Japanese import, in which you got to experience all the thrills and hassles that come with being a human fly. But why was the bald, green-suited hero climbing up the 200 floors of the perilous Nichibutsu buildings in the first place? Simple: He's crazy.

Given the numerous obstacles your man had to skirt on his quest to the rooftop (where a helicopter waited for him), perhaps "Dumb-Ass Climber" would have been the more appropriate title. As you moved him from ledge to ledge, Crazy had to be on the alert for windows shutting on his fingers, pissed-off building tenants dropping flowerpots and other rubbish on his noggin, as well as falling debris (such as self-promoting Crazy Climber signs). To top it off, a condor appeared every so often and starts raining nasty-looking bird droppings on him. Did it have to do that?

The biggest obstacle, however, was learning how to work the controls. The two joysticks, which neatly approximated the raising of Crazy's arms and legs when done correctly, required complete concentration to master. You could settle into a rhythm in those rare moments when nothing was plummeting toward you, but most of the time was spent scrambling horizontally out of harm's way.

The good news was that Climber gave you plenty of encouragement. If you dawdled or got stuck on a particular ledge, he'd shout "Go for it!" You'd also hear "Ouch!" if he got beaned on his follically challenged head, and a Mr. Bill-like "Oh noooo!" when he got separated from the building and fell to his ghastly demise. His tombstone might have read: "Here lies Climber. He may have been crazy, but we liked him just the same."

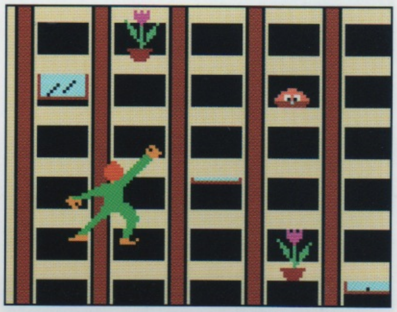
Game: Crazy Climber

Year: 1980

Manufacturer: Taito

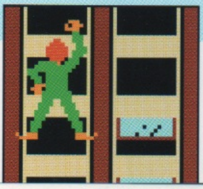
Controller: Two eight-direction joysticks

Plot: Spider up the side of a skyscraper while avoiding falling junk, a chest-pounding gorilla and gobs of grody condor doo-doo



More Better Crazy

Crazy Climber 2 hit arcades in 1988 with trickier obstacles and vastly improved graphics (e.g. Crazy Climber actually had a visible rear end). The most notable change in the game was that our smooth hero got bonus points for kissing buxom women, who sometimes appeared in the windows. What a stud!



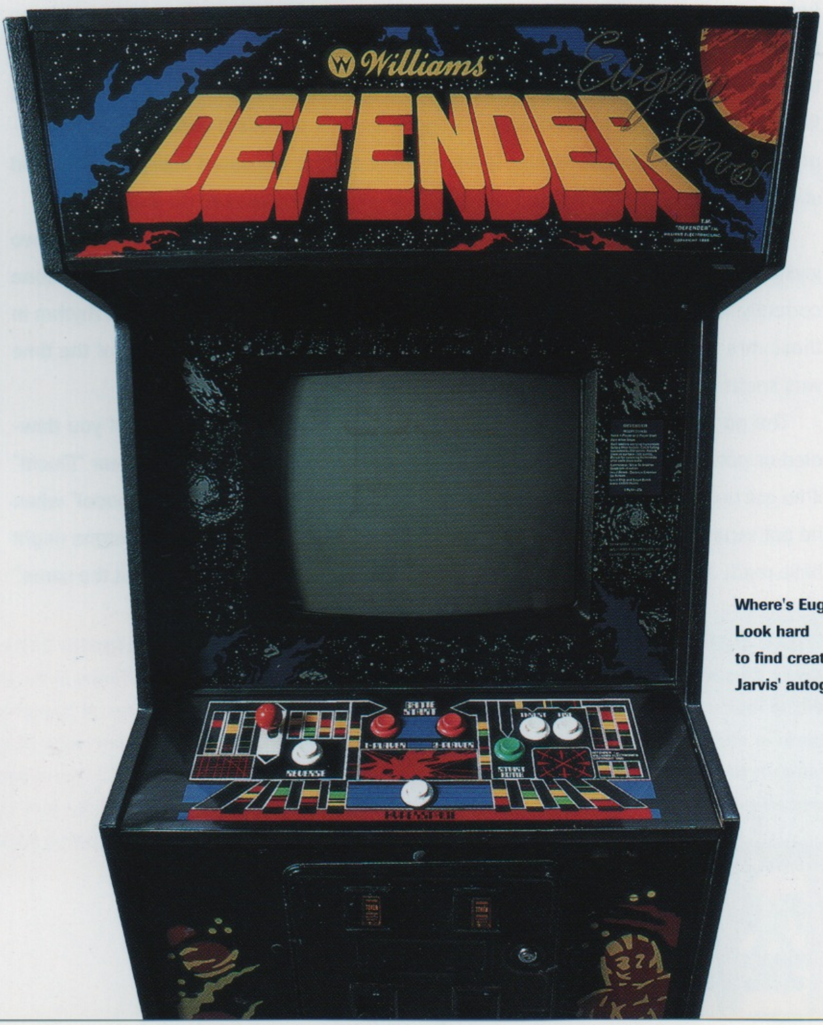
Company Line

Distributed in the U.S. by Taito, Crazy Climber was the best-known release of Japan-based Nichibutsu. Other classics include the Galaxian clone Moon Cresta, (1980); its 1985 sequel Terra Cresta, the 1982 tire-in-space shoot'em-up Radical Radial; and the audacious Frisky Tom (1981), in which a horny plumber fixes pipes in order to watch a blond taking a shower. I'd buy that for a quarter!

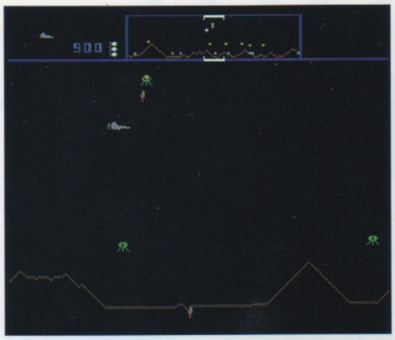
Defender

You didn't have what it takes to captain the *Defender,* the spaceship hero of Williams' 1980 video game. But don't worry: No one did, except genetic freaks. What human could hope to master those brain-ripping controls, which included five buttons and a joystick? Indeed, the space shooter, created by sadist Eugene Jarvis, (see interview pages 52–53) caused all but a select pack of big dogs to run with their tails between their legs back to the safer confines of the Pac-Man machine.

For all the trauma it caused, Defender sure was a marvel to behold. Its bright explosions, muffled sound effects and bizarre story line went hand-in-hand with its devilish gameplay. You were the *Defender,* a multi-functional spaceship cruising the alien-infested skies above a besieged colonial outpost. Your impossible mission, should you have chosen to accept it, was to fend off tenacious green Landers intent



Where's Eugene? Look hard to find creator Jarvis' autograph.



Game: Defender

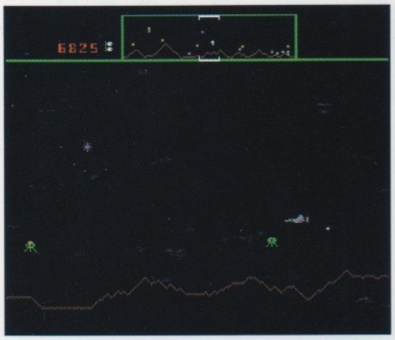
Year: 1980

Manufacturer: Williams Electronics

Controls: Two-direction joystick, fire button, thrust button, "hyperspace" button, reverse button, smart bomb button

Plot: Rid a hostile planetary surface of swarming aliens and save the humanoids from being turned into mutants

Major milestone: First side-scrolling game



on absconding with the humanoid population in your care. If you let this happen, your charges—really nothing more than multi-colored stick figures on the planet surface—would be recycled into hyperactive Mutants and start bombarding you with missiles.

And that was just the easy part. As the game progressed, ever more villainous UFOs homed in on you. These included Baiters, missile-spewing discs that could fly circles around you; annoying purple Bombers; and 1000-point Pods that broke into tiny red pests called Swarmers. Swarm! Swarm! You had to deal with all of these variables while ensuring the continuation of the humanoid populace below. Sometimes you got so flustered when a Lander was hoisting one of the poor colonists toward mutantdom that you accidentally shot one of your own. Other times, you'd eliminate the thief but forget to rescue the humanoid as it plunged fatally to the ground.

The game's difficulty started with the mind-addling controls; they demanded complete mental and physical oneness. The stubby joystick and reverse button occupying your left hand, you'd be forced to work the other four buttons with your overmatched right. In the span of two split seconds, you might zoom right, hit reverse, zoom left, go up, fire, hit reverse and zoom right. Whatever happened to games that only used a joystick?

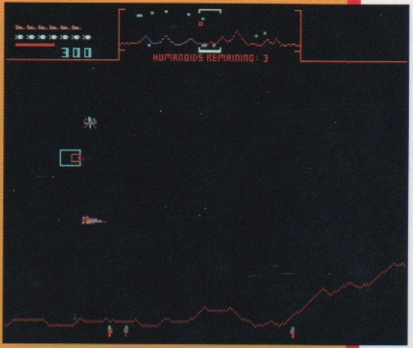
Most players quickly detonated the smart bombs, overused hyperspace and failed to glance at the useful scanner inset because their brains had simply shut down. It was truly pathetic.

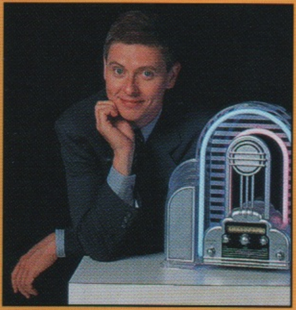
As humbling as Defender could be—and a twenty-second game wasn't entirely out of the question—you stubbornly threw rolls of quarters into the damn thing anyway. Perhaps you hadn't learned your lesson yet, or, worse, you'd watched in awe as a Defender master beautifully brought the game to its knees.

Williams sold around 60,000 units of Defender, easily the company's most successful game.

A Stargate is Born

A year later, Williams put out a more colorful and—get this—even more complicated sequel called Stargate. The game added an insane sixth button in the form of the Romulan-like Inviso Cloaking Device. It also tested wits with even trickier aliens, one of which conveniently incorporated the name of Williams' chief rival spelled backwards: the Yllabian Space Guppy i.e. Bally.





Stargate Offender

Stargate's greatest contribution to society may have come when it was used as fodder for a fantastic episode of the mid-90s NBC sitcom *NewsRadio,* in which the character played by Dave Foley (pictured) claims to have tanked his SATs because he stayed up all night playing Stargate Defender. Now that's reality TV.

Juraszek Age

As proclaimed in the *Time* magazine cover story on the video game explosion (January 18, 1982), a 15-year-old Illinois youth named Steve Juraszek played Defender for 16 hours and 34 minutes on a single quarter. Although his feat has long since been overshadowed and even then was hotly contested—there was some question as to his machine's difficulty setting—the publicity frenzy it set off helped to make such tests of the bladder commonplace.

The Creator

Eugene Jarvis, the programming guru behind Defender and Robotron: 2084, discusses the glory days of video-game design

You have probably been humiliated by Eugene Jarvis. As a 25-year-old designer for Williams Electronics, he ushered in a new era of frustration with his mind-addling space shoot-'em-up Defender, the game that launched pinball manufacturer Williams Electronics into the video stratosphere and landed Jarvis a congratulatory interview with *Playboy* magazine. He quickly chased the smash with the equally insane 1981 sequel, Stargate, and then began developing Robotron: 2084, one of the most humbling games of 1982. Still churning out hits today—witness his Cruisin' driving series for Midway—Jarvis has justifiably grown into a celebrity among programmers. Here, *Arcade Fever* kneels before the shrine of the twisted genius.

Arcade Fever: Defender was supposed to debut at a big coin-op conference in 1980, and you almost didn't make the deadline. What happened?

Eugene Jarvis: That was a pretty good save. I think it was around six o'clock at night, and at that point, it didn't have an attract mode, which is what the game does when no one is playing it. These days, you spend like three months doing something like that. Here, we're just sitting around going, "F*@#, we forgot to do an attract mode!" With twelve hours to go. So we just slapped together some simple attract mode that night.

AF: What time did you get it done?

EJ: Well, the weird thing was, at about 4 a.m., we burned the EPROMS, which is the actual program residing on the chips. And the f*@#ing thing didn't work, you know? It took like an hour. There were like 15 chips, and we plugged it in at about 5am and go, "F*@#, it doesn't work." I don't know if we ever figured out what went wrong. We just did the whole thing again and somehow it worked. So we went home, took a shower, put on our monkey suits, went down to the show and plugged these chips in and the games came on. And it was like five minutes before the show started.

AF: How did people respond to it?

EJ: People were scared of the game. It was just intimidating, you know? People just looked at it and said, "Okay, *you* play it. Show me how you do it." I guess the real surprise was when we put it out into an arcade.

AF: Were you there the first night?

EJ: I was afraid to show up the first night. I didn't even go there. There's nothing more depressing than when you put some game at an arcade and nobody plays it. There's some like ten-year-old game next to it, and they're playing that and they just ignore your game.

AF: That's called the Pooyan Principle.

EJ: *[Laughs]* I heard that some people were playing it, so the second night I showed up and these kids had chairs and sofas pulled up. They were just camped out. There were like 20 people huddled around. You've just never seen anything like it.

AF: Were you really good at the game at that point?

EJ: I was the champion for about the first week. I remember I got this score of about 61,000, and everybody in the company agreed that this was the highest humanly possible score. Nobody could ever beat this. And obviously after one week out in the field kids were just killing it.

AF: How was it realizing that other people were much better at the game you'd created?

EJ: I was almost in awe—of both the player and the game. You got these players that could play for days and you'd watch these guys and it was almost like watching some virtuoso guitarist, the way they would manuever the ship. There would be just any number of 28 bullets and mines and shit just cascading around their ship and somehow they'd have almost this total coolness. I was in awe of them—and the fact that the game could go to this level which I had never played. That the program would support these huge complex situations was just amazing.

AF: Defender was a pain in the ass.

EJ: It's funny, even an average player like myself would get to a point where you're in the groove and things are working for you and it seems like you can do no wrong. It's almost like you're immortal because you'll just do crazy-ass shit, and suddenly you're just pulling it off all over the place. And all of a sudden it'll kick off, and you'd lose like ten ships in like 20 seconds.

AF: What did you do for fun when working on a project?

EJ: Actually, we would hang out in arcades a lot. And this is kind of stupid: We'd often be working at night and this gay disco opened across the street from our office. So we'd sit in the dark and look out the windows and see the gay disco and we'd take bets on if the guy was gay or not. The determining factor was if he turned into the gay disco. Okay, five bucks! Five bucks! That was pretty weird.

AF: When you came up with the idea for Robotron, what were you smoking?

EJ: Way too many things in those days. I think if I hadn't been smoking, I probably would have gotten a lot more done.

AF: Why did you make it so darn hard?

EJ: The game mechanic was based on the psychology of having conflicting goals. You want to a) stay alive with all this shit coming at you, b) kill the robots, and c) rescue the humans. So there's this big conflict. You know, here's 20,000 points, but there's forty bullets coming at me. Do I go for it? It's kind of like if you feed a squirrel. A squirrel will come up to you when you have a nut, and he'll get really excited because "God, I really want this nut." So he gets close to you and begs and everything, but he's a little afraid to get too close to you because you might take a rock a kill him. So he's got this conflict of this great pleasure and this great horror all combined in one. And if you watch a squirrel it like jumps around and can't figure out what to do. It's kind of like the human player.

AF: It's quite frustrating.

EJ: Yeah. It is utter humiliation. One of the keys about Robotron 2084 is that when you die, it sort of freezes to show you what got you. It's like the dog, you know, where you rub the face in the shit on the floor. It rubs your face in it. You say, "How stupid! How did I walk into this stupid electrode? What caused me to do that?"

AF: What kind of people do you think played Robotron?

EJ: It's for people who want an athletic experience, like super testosterone-charged types. Often I'll play Robotron 2084 and I'll just be drenched in sweat. You have those two sticks, and there's a real physical element to them. I'll just push them as hard as I can. You think it'll make it go faster but obviously it does nothing. It just feels good to push harder on it.

AF: You're one of those people that bangs on the glass, too, aren't you?

EJ: Oh, yeah. I love the physicality. That's what I love about arcade games. Kicking the coin door and the beating on this glass, because you're getting pissed at them. Especially when it's a struggle between you and the machine. That's your last resort of humanity. The machine can't kick you back.

AF: What's your secret to getting higher-ups to greenlight your game ideas?

EJ: You know, you lie to them. You tell them whatever they want to hear just to get the project funded. And then once they're a year and a half down the road, it's too late to turn back at that point.

AF: As a game designer, do you ever feel like you're playing God?

EJ: Every designer has a vision of meglomania. You're creating a world. It's your way of recreating the universe in your own fashion. What are the rules of your world? Is there gravity? Is it eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, or is it that you kill things and they give you flowers. So that's what I love about creating a game is that you've created this new world that can be whatever you want it to be.

AF: You're one of the few programmers from the old days who is still designing today.

EJ: There's not too many survivors left. I think the business goes through these periodic nasty down cycles, or you can get into a personal down cycle where whatever you're into, the world isn't into. And you can take it very personally. As a designer, when your game doesn't hit, you just kind of go "F*@#!" You get this kind of self-hatred. Or you start hating your audience: "How can these people not appreciate this brilliant work. They're idiots!"

AF: Did you have any obsessive fans?

EJ: There was this one guy who would correspond with us. He started this club called the Stargate Video Rangers, where you'd be inducted and there were all these different levels of hierarchy. And [codesigner] Larry DeMar and I were promoted as honorary Supreme Star Admirals. Actually, he sent us some medals and some little sashes that we could wear. He'd actually taken the Stargate ship—which was this little thing that was like 28 pixels—and he had created all these engineering drawings of it and all the different rooms in it, like the reaction chamber and the engine room and the weapons system. He had created this elaborate blueprint and story behind the whole thing.

AF: What did you do?

EJ: After a while we were kind of getting sick of him, and he wrote us saying, "We're going to have this initiation ceremony. We're inducting four new members of the Stargate Video Rangers. As the Supreme Star Admirals, what do you recommend?" I was kind of in a bad mood and said, "I'm going to make this guy do some crazy shit." So I go, "Okay, at five a.m. at this mountain peak, stand at attention for one hour." It was terrible.

AF: That's so mean! Still, the attention must have been flattering.

EJ: It was flattering, but sometimes we were a little scared by the whole thing. The guy—he was into it. Even to this day, I'm almost a little scared that the guy's gonna hunt me down or something.

MISSILE COMMAND

Fire at my people, will you? Of course you know, this means war!

Atari's Cold War classic Missile Command ignited arcade nationalism greater than any game before it. Mesmerized by its hypnotic color graphics and intense gameplay, you'd rally around the flag and protect your military bases and metropolises from some paramilitary superpower that was threatening to destroy everything you cared about, including your hard-earned quarters. Blinding explosions and cool mechanical sounds emanated from the machine, and somehow you felt at peace standing amid all the chaos.

The funky controls further set the game apart from other releases of the day. As jets and satellites whizzed around the sky raining bombs downward, you manned three nuclear launch pads (Alpha, Delta and Omega) and spun the smooth Trak Ball (previously found on Atari's line of black-and-white sports games) in order to detonate your missiles in the path of the dangerous projectiles. Each of your bases had a limited number of shots; you had to be stingy and exact with your counterfire. Of course, this sucked because the enemy fire would unpredictably splinter off in two different directions, each heading directly for one of your poorly defended cities. Incoming!

To master the game, you had to launch a reliable initial volley at the missiles dropping on you from the top of the screen, yet retain enough firepower in your reserves to make your stand once the rotund satellites, sleek jets and evasive smart bombs started bombarding you a little later on into the stage. Still, you were only postponing the inevitable. This war was hell, and it was never long before you died in a blaze of glory. When all of your cities were toast, you'd whip out another quarter as a huge red-and-white explosion rocked the screen and pulled back to reveal the antiwar message "The End." As the insouciant computer Joshua said about such nuclear showdowns just three years later in *WarGames:* "The only winning move is not to play." Where Missile Command was concerned, this was never an option.

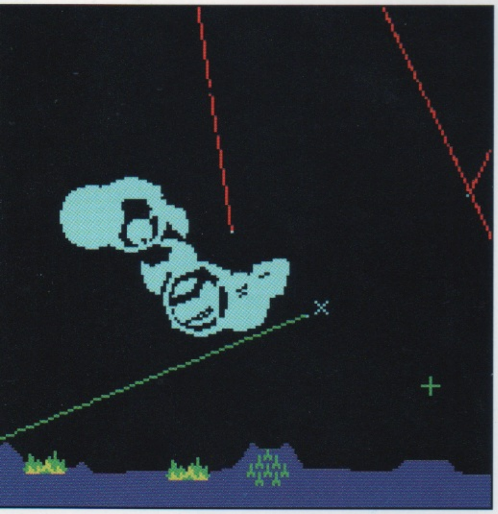
Game: Missile Command

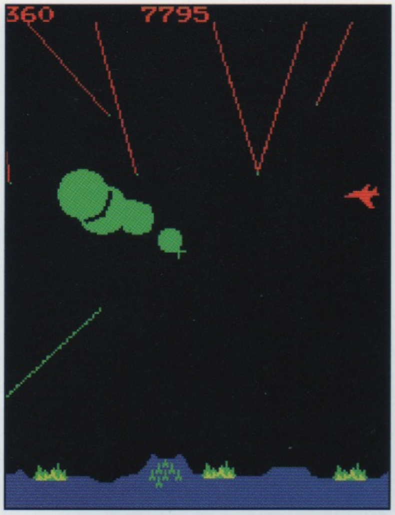
Year: 1980

Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Trak Ball, three fire buttons

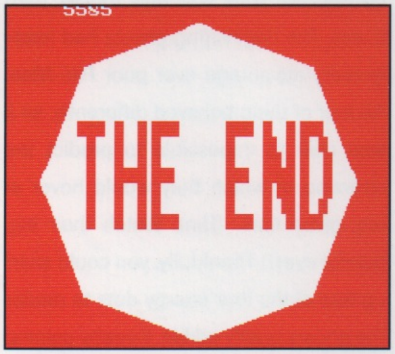
Plot: Prevent your country from losing World War III by deftly protecting your cities and missile bases from a full-scale air assault





End of Days

Missile Command, inspired by an article about satellite technology, originally sported the title Armageddon, because the battle you were waging signaled the end of the world. The suits at Warner Bros. (which owned Atari at the time) didn't know what Armageddon meant and thought that consumers wouldn't be able to spell or pronounce it. Armageddon very angry about that!



Pac-Man

Game: Pac-Man

Year: 1980

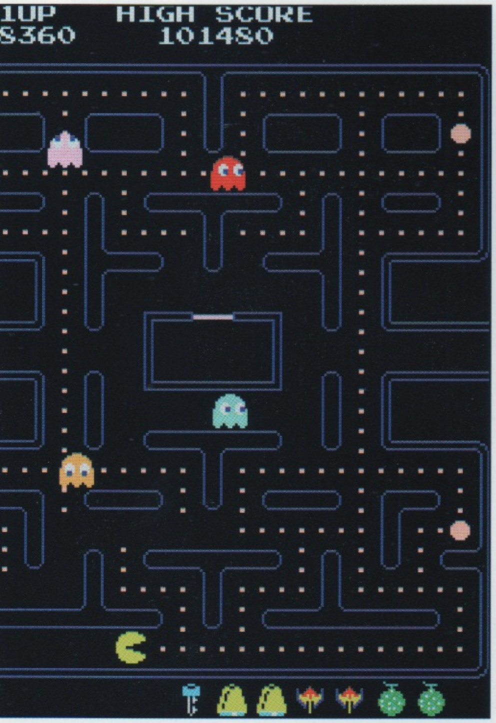
Manufacturer: Midway

Controls: Four-direction joystick

Plot: Help a rotund yellow guy stuff dots into his expectant piehole and avoid four colorful ghosts like the plague

Major milestone: The most successful video game of all time

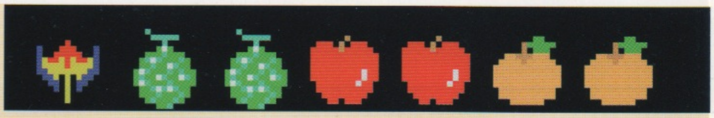
After sweeping through Tokyo like Godzilla, a hungry yellow beast named Pac-Man headed east across the Pacific. The thing could really pack it away, and video-game-smitten Americans, their pockets filled with quarters, were more than happy to oblige the odd-looking pie head's insatiable appetite for coins. It made no difference that the game that carried his name made no sense whatsoever. The eponymous and incredibly cute star of Midway's supernova 1980 release Pac-Man (designed in Japan by Namco) quickly became the video-game industry's mascot and had the entire country saying "wokka-wokka-wokka."



Salvador Dalí couldn't have dreamed up a more surreal experience than Pac-Man. Using only a joystick with a red knob, you controlled a fast-moving yellow creature that resembled a block of cheese with a slice hacked out of it. His curse: To scoot over and over again through a vivid blue maze eating 244 dots—no more, no less—while skillfully avoiding four unpredictable and brightly colored ghosts. No shooting, just chomping. Compared with the perfectly logical and entirely grown up space games that were the rage in the late 1970s, the cartoonish Pac-Man seemed like it came from the mind of a preschooler on Ritalin.

But behind the madness lay plenty of method. Borne by its colorful characters and cheerful sounds, Pac-Man was the first game that truly appealed to every demographic. Pac-Man himself ate and ate and ate and never got fat—what a kooky concept! You even knew what to call the enemy ghost monsters: The red one was Shadow (nicknamed Blinky), the pink guy was Speedy (Pinky), the teal dude was Bashful (Inky), and the butterscotch freak was Pokey (Clyde). Plus, there were cartoons. After completing certain boards, an excited riff would interrupt the game and an animated sketch would depict Pac-Man serving Blinky a figurative plate of humble pie. You ate it up, especially because a few of these scenes were downright gruesome.

While these appealing whimsical qualities cemented Midway's signature release in the hearts and minds of Americans—and, at 99,000 units sold, Pac-Man is easily the most successful arcade game of all time—what really hooked everyone was how friggin' hard it was. The flagellating ghosts had nearly every advantage over poor Pac-Man. All four of them behaved differently, so it was next to impossible to predict the direction in which they would hover at any given time. (Hint: Watch their big, baleful eyes!) Thankfully, you could snarf up one of the four energy dots to render the ghosts briefly edible, thereby gaining



The Parade of Snacks

Level 1: Cherries—Easy pickings

Level 2: Stawberry—There are ten tiny seeds in each

Levels 3-4: Peach—The worst two levels because of the intense Pac Attack

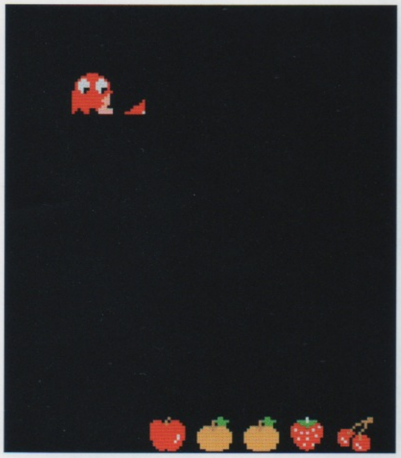
Levels 5-6: Apple—Yum!

Levels 7-8: Grapes—They look more like hand grenades or avocados

Levels 9-10: Galaxian flagship—It's the dude from Galaxian!

Levels 11-12: Custard pie—Pac stuffs his pie hole with the real article

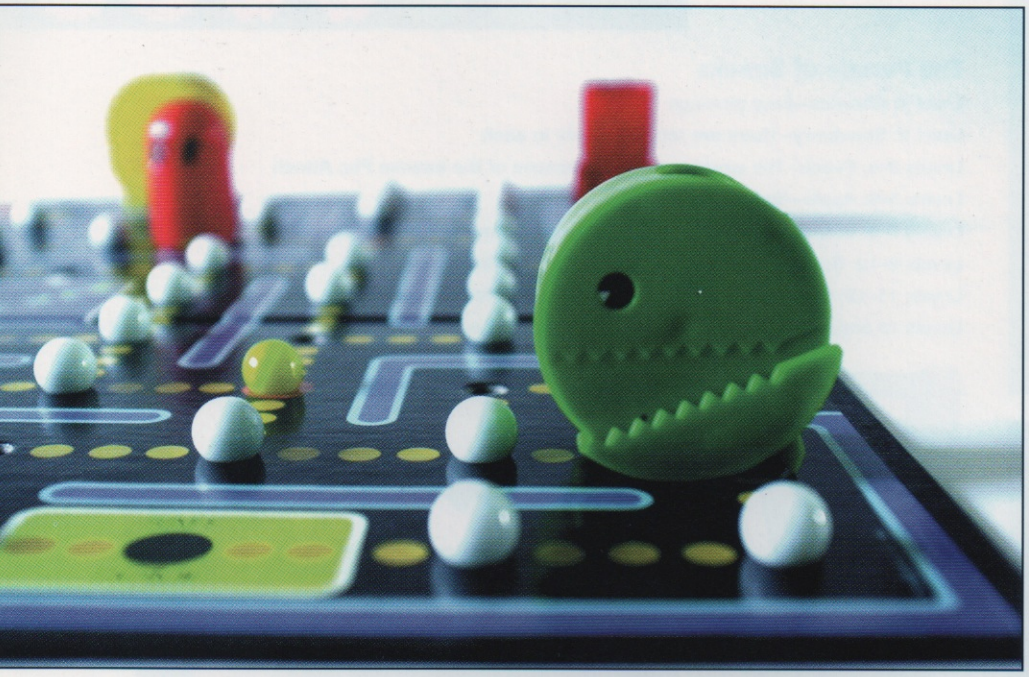
Levels 13 and up: Key—Starting with the fabled 9th Key, the ghosts no longer turn blue. Yikes!



massive munching points and sending the resulting pair of disembodied eyes to regenerate in the neutral "ghost box." But that created problems of its own: Sometimes you'd try to catch up to a blinking blue ghost and take a bite just as it reverted to its dangerous color again. Greed kills.

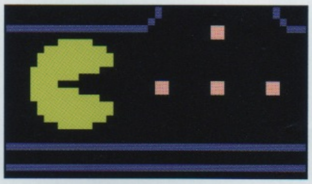
Barring a miracle, you typically lost your third guy (accompanied by a sad-sack whimper, the ultimate sound of failure) on the 2nd Peach. Luckily, there was a miracle: A programming oversight allowed vigilant players to devise their own patterns. While the ghosts did move

PAC-MAN
by MIDWAY
1UP
HIGH SCORE
2UP
GAME OVER
START GAME
MOVE
25¢
1 TOKEN
25¢



Domo Arigato, Mr. Iwatani

Like many of its major hits, Midway licensed Pac-Man from the Japanese company Namco. A widespread rumor had it that the game's designer, Toru Iwatan, bolted from Namco after receiving the equivalent of $3,500 in yen for his efforts. Poppycock! He happily stayed on with the company for years, designing a game called Libble Rabble before moving into upper management.

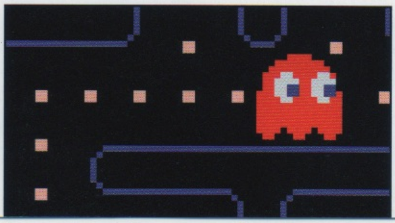


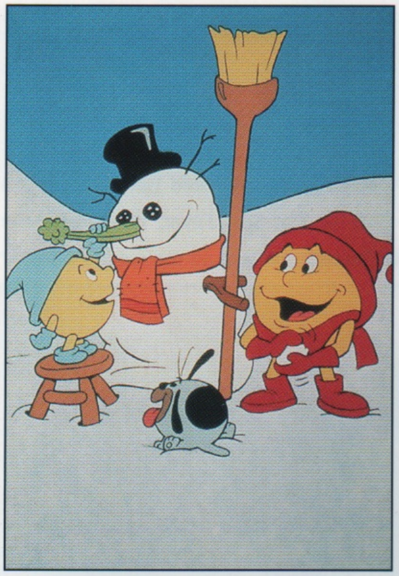
in random directions when you had no idea where you were going, their reactions ultimately depended on your movements. If you took a particular path the whole way around the maze, you could make them move in particular patterns. Once this glitch was revealed to the masses, Pac-Man became the ultimate topic for water cooler conversation. "I don't have pattern for the 2nd Galaxian!" someone would whine. "Mine got me up to the 9th Key last night," the answer might be. "I'm going for the 10th at lunch!"

It would take an entire book to try and describe just how big the Pac-Man phenomenon got in the year or two after its release. There was and never will be more hoopla surrounding a video game. Entire industries rose up to quench the sick demand for the jaundiced pellet eater, whose image graced everything from bed sheets to waste baskets and from cans of ravioli to underwear. There were cover stories in *Time, People,* and *Mad* magazines. A top-ten single, "Pac-Man Fever," briefly became a national anthem (see "The Novelty Act," pages 60–61). At one point in 1981, four books about mastering Pac-Man simultaneously charted on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Plots on shows such as *Square Pegs* and *Taxi* hinged on the phenomenon. People got married next to Pac-Man machines and towns declared Official Pac-Man Day. To say that video games had finally gone mainstream is an understatement.

In the end, of course, Pac-Man failed to break free from his ghost-ridden confinement, and people eventually dumped a guy who was clearly going nowhere fast. But the game's lasting legacy can still be found in the synapses of the same people who had Pac-Man Fever twenty years ago. Ask them to answer a simple geometry question and you'll get a blank stare; ask them to names the ghosts or identify the first four fruits and you'll kick off an important discussion. Pac-Man, you are not forgotten!

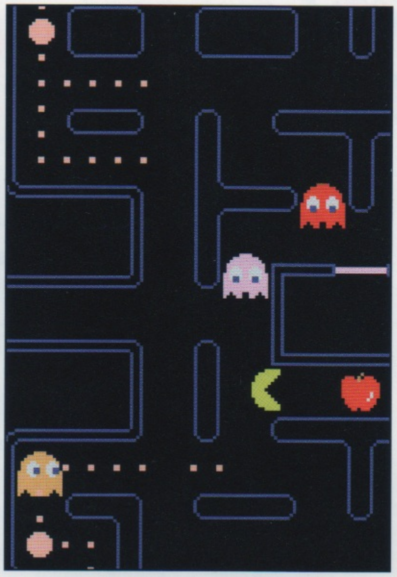
Fact: The Atari 2600 version of Pac-Man sucked.





Saturday Smorgasbord

You probably remember the inventive 1982–85 Saturday morning spectacular *Pac-Man,* the first cartoon based on a video game. According to the Hanna-Barbera production, our yellow hero and his main squeeze, Ms. Pac-Man, lived happily together with Baby Pac, dog Chomp Chomp and cat Sour Puss just outside the magical Power Forest where Pac-Man worked as chief of security. He constantly had to ward off the scheming wizard Mezmaron's five evil hench-ghosts: Inky, Blinky, Pinky, Clyde and Sue. In its second season, the cartoon was paired with *Rubik the Amazing Cube* for one of the most potent fad tandems in the history of television.



you pal,
PAC-MAN

PAC-MAN
by MIDWAY

Pac Daddy

On the 256th screen (a.k.a. the 244th Key), Pac-Man goes haywire. The left half of the screen is normal, but the right side is complete gibberish and ultimately impossible to clear. Therefore, the game's highest possible score—by eating every dot, all four ghosts whenever possible and every bonus snack—is confirmed to be 3,333,360 million. Because of this, the world record (currently held by video-game superstar Billy Mitchell) is now measured by who can achieve perfection the end the most quickly.

The Novelty Act

Catching up with Buckner and Garcia, creators of the deliciously cheesy 1982 song "Pac-Man Fever."

Every phenomenon needs a theme song. Luckily, video-game-obsessed Americans had Jerry Buckner and Gary Garcia, two Atlanta-based jingle writers who stoked the quarter-burning fire with their massive 1982 hit "Pac-Man Fever." Released at the dizzying height of the titular game's popularity, the single quickly sold over a million copies, made it all the way to number nine on *Billboard's* influential Hot 100 chart, and spawned an entire album about video games. The world somehow became more inhabitable.

Sadly, Buckner and Garcia fell off the radar faster than you can say "Doin' the Donkey Kong" (the album's failed second single). Friends since junior high school, the durable duo had an unfortunate struggle with their record label CBS to release a ballad called "E.T., I Love You" and eventually returned to jingle writing and other musical ventures. Recently, they emerged as Internet radio pioneers at their web site www.bucknergarcia.com, where you can hear the fabled "E.T." song, listen to other '80s tunes and, of course, purchase the *Pac-Man Fever* album. *Arcade Fever* caught up with the men who gave the world the painfully true lyric "got a pocketful of quarters and I'm heading to the arcade."

Arcade Fever: Did you guys personally catch Pac-Man Fever, or was it more of a bad cold?

Jerry Buckner: *[Laughs]* Is this one of those Barbara Walters questions? We were into the game as much as anyone else was. The Pac-Man thing, it was an addiction for people. I mean, everybody was playing that game. Everybody played it. All ages.

AF: How did you first conceive of the "Pac-Man Fever" idea?

Gary Garcia: At the time the game came out in about '80, we were in the studio recording some other material, and we stopped at a club on the way home and looked at this machine and said, "Hey, this is pretty neat." We started messing with it and got kind of hooked on it. At that time, we said this might be something we could do a song on. We didn't do much about it for a while, and then later on our manager kind of got into the game also and said, "Hey what do you think about doing a song on this?" But it was still really unknown to the general public.

AF: Did you borrow the title from Ted Nugent's "Cat Scratch Fever"?

Garcia: For some reason, people thought that. But no.

AF: Did you brainstorm alternate titles, like "Pac-Man Malaria"?

Buckner: I don't think so. We agreed on that title pretty easily. The title wasn't the problem. The problem was coming up with the lyrics.

AF: Did you really know all the right patterns up to the 9th Key, as you boast in the second verse?

Buckner: Man, we knew them all. Nobody could beat us at that game.

Garcia: He's lying.

AF: Who was better between you?

Buckner: I think Gary was probably better.

Garcia: Oh, I don't know about that.

AF: Seriously, though, were you guys any good?

Buckner: They used to have us go into arcades on occasion if we could do a personal appearance, and they always had the same idea. They'd want to bring some little kid who was a champion player to play against us, and he would whip our ass. You just wanted to reach down and pop this kid.

AF: How did you decide on which games to write songs about for the album?

Buckner: We'd go to a club somewhere, anywhere, and try to find a new game. If we found a new game, then we'd try to find somebody who knew how to play it. Then we'd watch him, or try to play it ourselves. Whatever it took to figure it out. And then we'd go home and write the song.

AF: Why the heck did you pick Mouse Trap?

Buckner: I don't know.

AF: How did you record the sounds?

Buckner: That was done literally by a guy from the studio going out and recording them off the machines. I think you can hear somebody ordering a sandwich in "Pac-Man Fever", if you listen real quiet during the sound-effect part.

AF: What kind of sandwich?

Buckner: Pastrami. He was in a delicatessen somewhere when he recorded it.

AF: You appeared on MTV but didn't even have a video. What gives?

Buckner: That was the period of time when videos were just beginning. It wasn't even on in Atlanta. But MTV was doing a whole day devoted to video games. And we went over there and were interviewed. It was a big deal for them. I remember it being pretty uneventful, to be honest.

AF: Did you meet Martha Quinn?

Buckner: No. We were on with Alan Hunter.

PAC-MAN FEVER
BUCKNER & GARCIA

AF: What a gyp.

Garcia: But we met the *Solid Gold* Dancers.

Buckner: Did we ever.

AF: Wow. What were they like?

Buckner: Oh, they were hot. Very hot.

AF: Did the *Solid Gold* Dancers perform during "Pac-Man Fever"?

Buckner: Sure. They did the whole nine yards.

Garcia: Right behind us!

AF: Nice! How did the quick fame change your life?

Garcia: People that lived around you all of a sudden knew that you were this person doing that. It got hectic for a while.

Buckner: I remember in California when we were out there, we got phone calls in our room and it was females, you know. I remember one call, this girl wanted to know if I might be lonely or something. I mean she was a prostitute. How she knew we were there, I don't know.

AF: What was the hardest part about being an overnight sensation?

Buckner: The thing that was really interesting was suddenly you're a genius. Suddenly everybody's talking to you about doing this and doing that, and you're this musical genius that you weren't 30 days before that.

Garcia: Or 30 days after.

AF: After "Pac-Man Fever," you wrote but never released a song about Mr. T. How did the tune go?

Garcia: I would liken it to "Shaft."

Buckner: The guy's saying, "I need help! Mr. T.! Mr. T.!" I think probably that song of any we ever cut probably had the best feel.

AF: Why didn't it come out?

Buckner: It was a CBS Records thing. Hey, let me tell you about this business. . . We go all the way to New York to meet with the vice president to play him our new songs and talk about our future, right? This is, like, a big meeting. So we climb on a plane, we hit turbulence, we're almost killed in a plane crash. It was awful. We get to New York, we go to CBS and the guy that we were to meet with says, "So, guys, what brings you here?" That's how that meeting started. And we played stuff for him and one of the comments was "If I had a record company, I'd put that out." So we knew after that day that we were in trouble.

Garcia: Basically, what we did with "Pac-Man Fever" was hand them something that made money without them having to do much to promote it and whatever. And they just looked at it as a one-shot deal and it was like, take the money and run.

AF: Was it frustrating after the huge success of "Pac-Man Fever" to get a cold shoulder from CBS?

Garcia: Very. The worst part about it is they wouldn't put out any more of our material, but they wouldn't let us out of the contract either, so they basically took away our right to make a living, so to speak. And that's what we were most mad at.

AF: Still, "Pac-Man Fever" made it to number nine on the *Billboard* chart. Ahead of you that week were some quintessential '80s songs, like the Go-Go's "We Got the Beat" and Joan Jett's "I Love Rock 'n Roll." That had to feel pretty good.

Buckner: Oh, yeah, it did. The truth is, though, "Pac-Man Fever" was a number one song. There's no doubt in my mind. But they're not going to allow us to have a number one song over Joan Jett or the Go-Go's because these are acts they're spending a lot of money on. Hey, but at least we made the top ten.

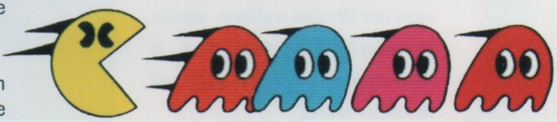
AF: This might help: Ever thought about swapping last names?

Buckner: Why would we? *[Pause]* Oh, I see.

AF: Did people confuse you as being a Jerry Garcia side project?

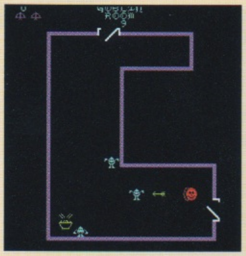
Buckner: Gary got that all the time.

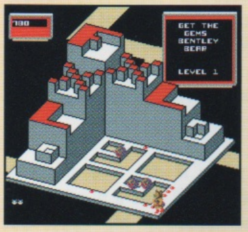
Garcia: Oh, yeah. Still happens today. I usually say, "You know, Jerry's dead, and I'm just half dead."



hall of shame

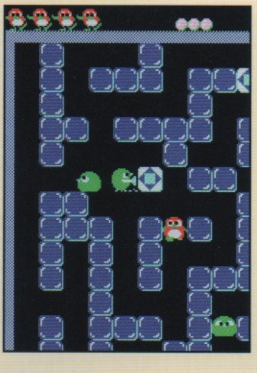
Immediately after Pac-Man set off the first video-game licensing frenzy in 1980, giddy manufacturers tried to duplicate the marketing maelstrom by creating a bevy of cuddly characters. Atari and its brethren threw handfuls of kid-friendly personas at the wall, but only a select few (e.g. Donkey Kong, Q*Bert, Dirk the Daring) stuck around long enough to become icons of the arcade age. And then there were these:





Winky (Exidy, 1981)

With the blurry 1981 release Venture, a Dungeons & Dragons–style maze game, the brass at Exidy attempted to turn an arrow-slinging amoeba named Winky into a memorable character. The smiling little red blob was introduced in the Venture flyer as "a friend you will be meeting again in future Exidy games." Don't you believe it.

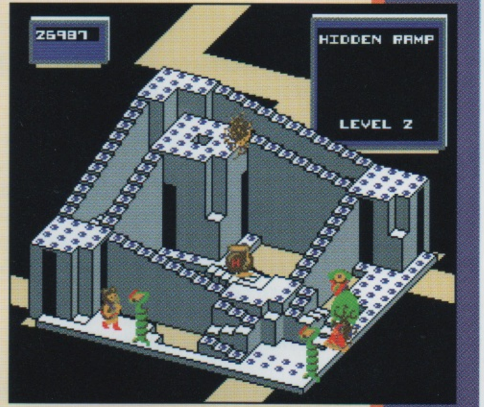


Pengo (Sega, 1982)

You really, really wanted to like Pengo, the Chilly Willy–inspired star of Sega's brain-challenging South Pole classic. Alas, the chunky ice-pushing penguin left you feeling cold because the game was harder than ice.

Bentley Bear (Atari, 1982)

Atari's 3-D oddity Crystal Castles starred Bentley Bear, a furry wizard who explored crazy structures for rubies and a magic hat. Amblatory trees and other incongruous creatures added to Crystal Castles's utter weirdness and probably hastened Bentley Bear's extinction.

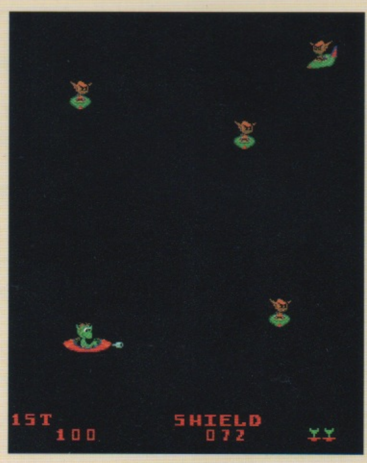


Circus Charlie (Konami/Centuri, 1983)

The makers of the ultracool Time Pilot and Track and Field regrouped for this waste of arcade space, starring a danger-prone clown named Circus Charlie. Neither cute nor well-drawn, the little guy received a "sorry, Charlie!" from the general public.

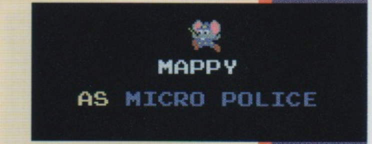
K'roozer (Midway, 1983)

For some unknown reason, Midway made this obscure and horribly drawn alien the star of not one but two 1983 titles, Kozmik Krooz'r and Wacko. The extraterrestrial's apostrophe was certainly uncalled for, but far more annoying was the Wacko cabinet, which purposefully looked like it was assembled by a team of drunken idiots.

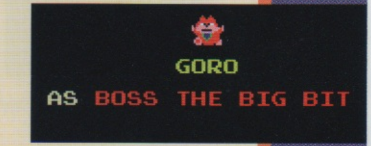


Mappy (Midway, 1983)

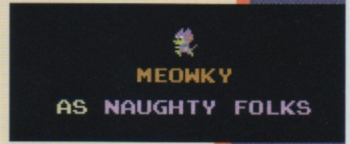
Although the colorful 1983 release Mappy was designed by Namco, the company behind the Pac-Man craze, the game's trampolining mouse cop hero bounced out of arcades quicker than you could say "rodent turds!" Sadly, the world has seen little of his awesome feline nemeses Goro (a.k.a. Boss the Big Bit) and Meowky (a.k.a Naughty Folks). Mappy, we hardly knew ye!



MAPPY
AS MICRO POLICE



GORO
AS BOSS THE BIG BIT



MEOWKY
AS NAUGHTY FOLKS

Rally-X

You can almost hear Philbin asking the following question at the $1,000,000 level: At the 1980 convention of the Amusement and Machine Operators Association, the consensus choice for "most promising game" went to which of the following arcade classics? Was it a) Pac-Man, b) Defender, c) Battlezone, or d) Rally-X? If you chose 'd,' and that was indeed your final answer, you'd truly deserve the cool million. Only someone worthy of the big prize would have guessed that Midway's jaunty but little-known Rally-X was the David that knocked off all those future quarter-chomping Goliaths.

Not that Rally-X didn't deserve its initial accolades. The game provided some serious thrills as you sped around in your cute blue buggy and scoured a maze in order to capture a set of yellow flags. Since the screen only showed a portion of the playing grid, you had to glance at a small master map to pick out the position of the next flag. This frequent distraction put you in danger of running headlong into a pesky red enemy vehicle or smashing into one of the grid's immovable boulders, which didn't appear on the map. When you hit one, you were as disappointed as Charlie Brown when he said, "I got a rock."

Adding even more to the challenge, your car's fuel gauge acted as a built-in timer because you had to collect all the flags before you hit empty. Achieving your goal grew more difficult as the number of pursuers increased with each new level. Luckily, your buggy was equipped with the ingenious smoke-screen defense mechanism, which you allowed you to poo-poo out a few puffs of exhaust. Besides making a cool noise and looking like they were drawn by Chuck Jones, the smoke clouds caused the red cars to spin around in futility while you got the heck out of there.

Rally-X's longest lasting emission to the video–game ether was its debut of the bonus stage, a signature of later classics like Galaga and Joust. Despite this important innovation and certain addictive gameplay elements, Rally-X paled next to the supernova releases that it had bested at its coming out party. In a parallel universe, a song called "Rally-X Fever" might have gone platinum.

Game: Rally-X

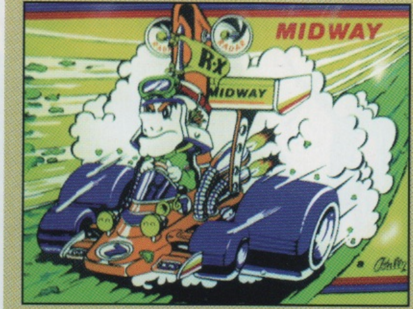
Year: 1980

Manufacturer: Midway

Controls: Four-direction joystick, "smoke screen" button

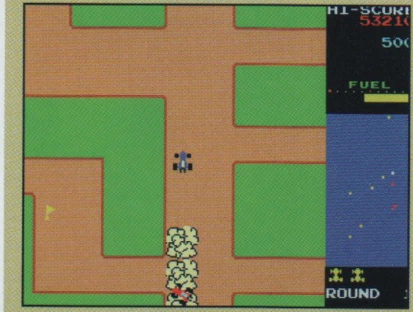
Plot: Tool around a maze in a blue buggy picking up flags and smoke-screening red hot rods

Major milestone: First game with a bonus round



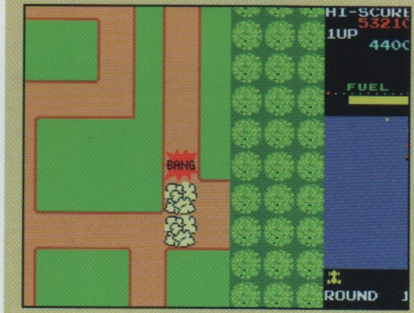
Rally Killer

The artwork on the sides of the cabinet and on the marquee depicted a foppish dude with a massive head driving a car that is way too small for him. Perhaps the reason more people didn't play the game was because they were revolted by the guy's freakish noggin.



Real Bangeroo

When you ran into something, a cartoonish sign would appear over your car and say "BANG." Gee, thanks for rubbing it in.



CENTIPEDE
ATARI
HIGH SCORES
1 COIN 1 PLAY
BONUS EVERY 12000
©1980 ATARI
TOKEN

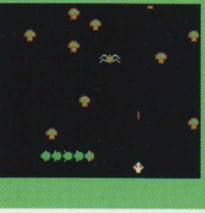
Centipede

To most people, the only good bug is a dead bug. With the release of the ingenious Centipede, Atari capitalized on the general public's distaste for insects and had even the most squeamish gamers squashing creepy crawlies all day long. Bonus: You weren't even required to mop up the icky remains.

Alas, killing these critters proved to be back-breaking, not to mention palm-chafing, work. Segments of centipede poured down the screen toward your tiny bug blaster, and the darned things just wouldn't sit still. At first a single entity, the glowing beast broke into quicker moving units whenever your lasers hit it and each resulting creature had a mind of its own. Left and right they squirmed, bumping into the seemingly billions of meddlesome mushrooms that populated the screen and inching closer toward your hilariously impotent pea shooter. You attempted to pick them off one by one, but after a screen or two, you knew the endeavor was hopeless. You'd spin the Trak Ball erratically back and forth to keep up with the vile things, only to watch them infiltrate your shooting area and make you dance like a lily-livered fool.

As if tackling the crazy-legged centipede wasn't hard enough, you were also forced to confront the Spider Conundrum. Every three or four seconds, a stupid arachnid would jiggle and bounce its way through the tiny band of screen that confined your ship, so you couldn't just concentrate on blasting the upper parts of the playing field. The greed factor took over, big time, because you got a paltry 300 points for shooting the spider at its apex but a tasty 900 if you plastered it in the millimeters above your man. More than once, this mind game got the better of you, and your ship became the fly that stepped into the spider's parlor.

1981



In headlines:
Ronald Reagan kicks Carter out of the White House; Prince Charles weds Lady Diana in front of way too many people

At theaters:
Raiders of the Lost Ark bullwhips competition; *Porky's* sates teen horndogs

On TV:
Bitchiness rules on *Dynasty;* homework begins suffering at the hands of MTV

In music:
Rick Springfield whines about "Jesse's Girl;" Sting loses kids with the "Don't Stand So Close To Me" Nabakov reference

Top off this insanity with freefalling fleas that cluttered the screen with fungi and scampering scorpions that could poison certain mushrooms—which in turn caused any centipedal segment that touched them to do a nose dive toward the bottom of the screen—and the average game lasted about as long as a typical commercial for Raid. (Your quarter checked in but it didn't check out.) Like bug extermination itself, the harrowing process almost certainly should have been left to the professionals.

So what kept even the lamest players coming back for more punishment? Like the equally humbling Space Invaders and Asteroids before it, Centipede gradually increased in tempo, featured cool cabinet art (of an angry 100-legged giant) and boasted that addictive heartbeat sound effect to get your blood racing. You forked over that credit for one of the purest adrenaline rushes at the arcade. You had become a true insectivore.

Insect Lady

While Atari design legend Ed Logg (Asteroids, Gauntlet) for Centipede's emasculating action, imagine what the game would have looked like without that serene mushroom patch. The person who put the fungus among us was Dona Bailey, the first woman to codesign an arcade video game. She also spruced up the color scheme by painting everything in warm pastel tones to make the characters seem less angry. As a result, the game reportedly attracted a higher percentage of women players, a surprising fact given the squirmy subject matter. Guys really are big babies, aren't they?

Atari manufactured around 50,000 million units of Centipede, making it the company's third most successful game behind Asteroids and Battlezone.

Game: Centipede

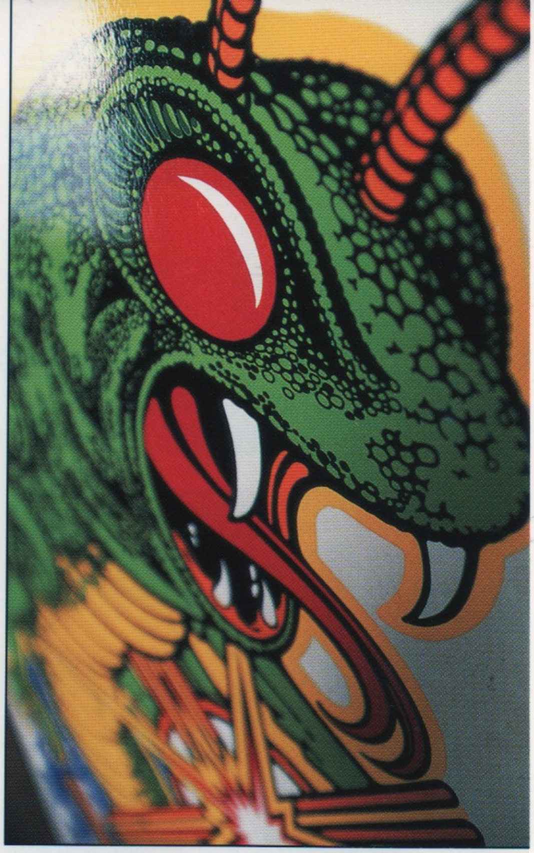
Year: 1981

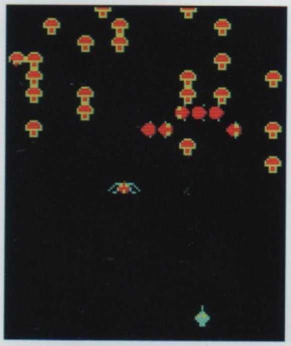
Manufacturer: Atari

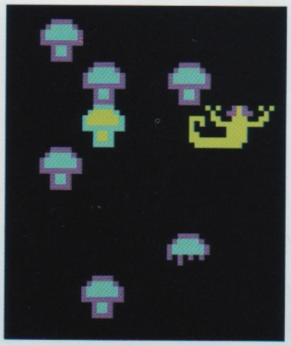
Controls: Trak Ball, fire button

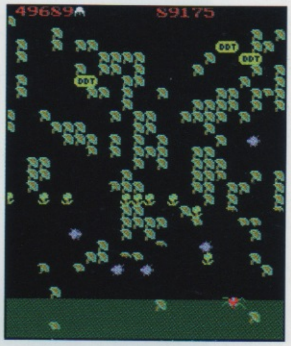
Plot: Waste incessant centipedes and a disturbing horde of other dangerous insectoids

Major milestone: First arcade video game with a woman's touch



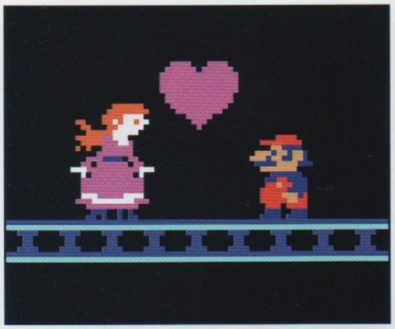


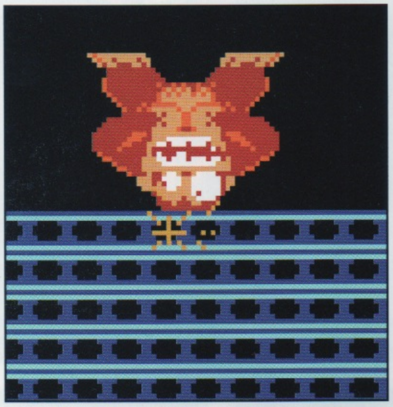




Bugging Out

Millipede, the 1982 sequel to Centipede, infested in arcades with more of the same befuddling gameplay and a bigger armada of insects. The cabinet sported stellar artwork, featuring an archer taking aim at and being hunted by the thousand-legged title character and its insectoid minions, as well as a flourish of vines and brambles all around the controller and coin areas. Besides the main millipede, you had to spray OFF on jackknifing mosquitoes, kamikaze bees, drunken dragonflies, helpful inchworms, grotesque earwigs, pollinating beetles and, of course, ball-busting spiders. Once again, you received full license to commit insecticide.





Donkey Kong

Maybe it was his mustache. Maybe it was the snazzy red overalls he wore. Most likely, though, the plucky carpenter Jumpman from Nintendo's 1981 megahit Donkey Kong grew into one of the world's most recognizable video-game characters because everyone loves an underdog. Even one who changed his name and profession more often than his pants.

It was an age-old story: Donkey Kong pitted a hammer-wielding underdog versus a grumpy barrel-throwing villain who absconded with his foxy girlfriend. Luckily, your hero, a simple carpenter aptly named Jumpman, had better leaping skills than Carl Lewis, and he used this talent to hop over wayward junk at the construction site where the treacherous ape Donkey Kong had set up camp. For extra incentive, Jumpman's terrified girlfriend waited for him at the top of the screen. She was probably the only thing other than a heaping plate of linguini that could get the plump craftsman to break a sweat.

Donkey Kong was a rare case for 1981 in that the game was divided into four distinct stages (at the time, only Midway's Gorf offered as many different boards in one game). In the deceptively difficult first scene, Jumpman had to scale ladders to reach his main squeeze while Kong angrily chucked barrels down the unfinished structure. The second level required some serious twinkle toes as hopping-mad fireballs swarmed to thwart your attempt to knock eight

Game: Donkey Kong

Year: 1981

Manufacturer: Nintendo

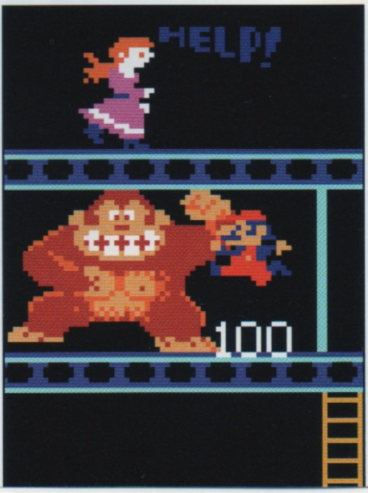
Controls: Four-direction joystick, jump button

Plot: Guide the mustachioed Jumpman, also known as Mario, through a danger-ridden construction site to save his helpless girlfriend from a big dumb ape named Donkey Kong

Major milestone: Launched the Nintendo rocket

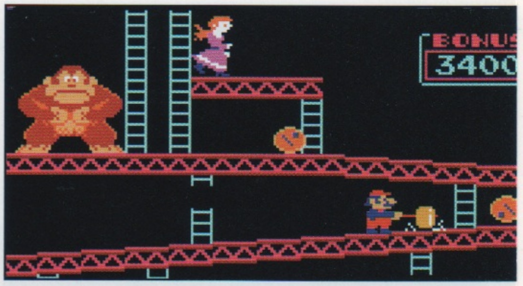
Name of Fame

Mario wasn't given his name until well after Donkey Kong had been designed. After receiving the program from overseas, the Nintendo of America team needed to refine the English-language instructions for the cabinet and wanted to ascribe real names to Jumpman and his girlfriend. They quickly settled on Pauline for the girl, but were stuck on a name for the bulbous-nosed hero until Mario Segali, the owner of Nintendo's leased warehouse outside of Seattle, came calling for the rent. Can you imagine if it had been the Culligan man?



Monkey Business

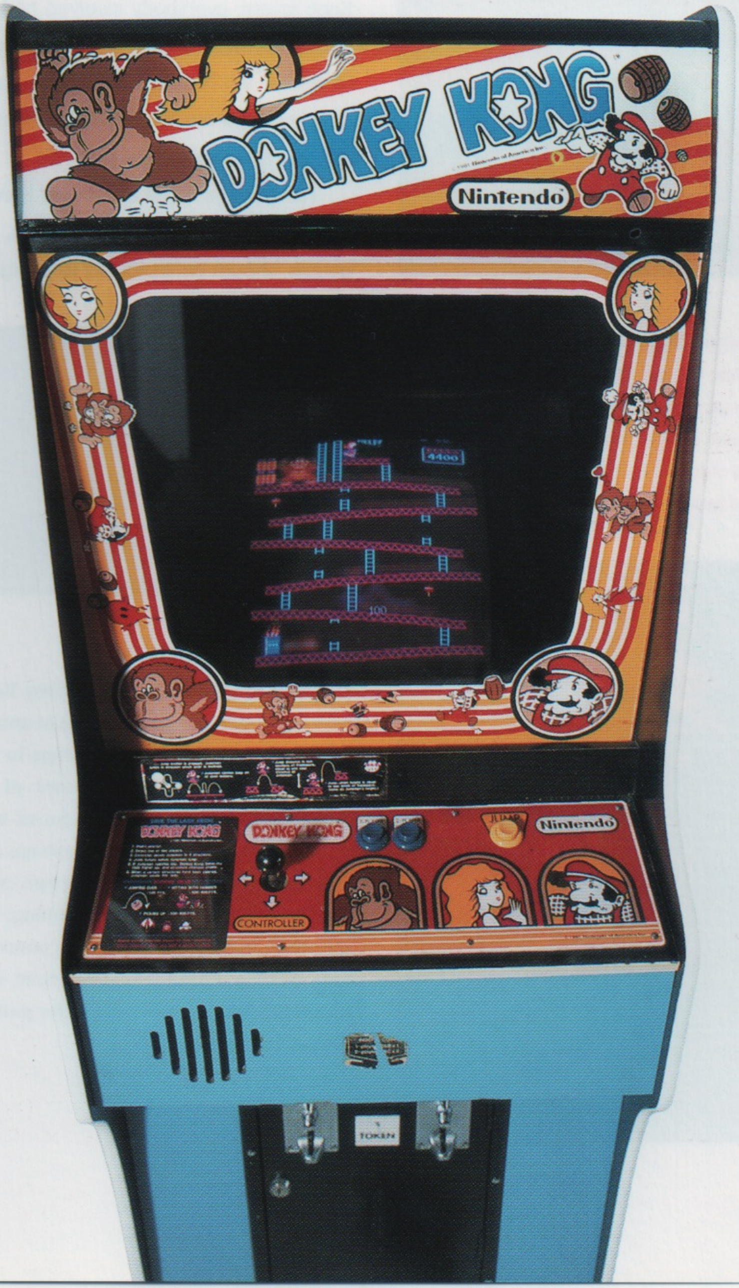
The story of how Donkey Kong got its name has been widely disputed. The prevailing theory, as reported by David Sheff in the excellent 1991 Nintendo profile *Game Over,* is that the Japanese designers just plucked it from a Japanese-to-English dictionary. Thanks to the film series, "Kong" is synonymous with "monkey," and the the reverse translation of "donkey" is apparently "stubborn." Makes sense: Donkey Kong is nothing if not a stubborn monkey. But a popular theory at the height of the game's popularity contended that the name was simply a misspelling of "Monkey Kong." The only indisputable fact is that you're not going to find any donkeys in the game.

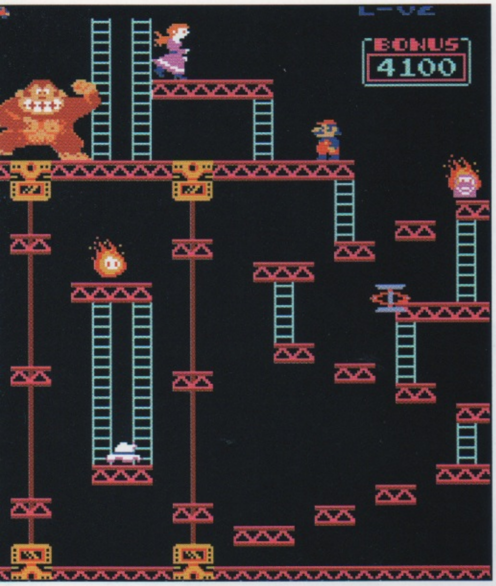


rivets out of a wobbly blue scaffolding and send the silly monkey into freefall. Things got stickier still on the last two levels: the elevator stage, where Jumpman kangarooed across tiny moving platforms and sidestepped plummeting girders, and the "pie factory," so dubbed due to the trays of tasty-looking cement that made life hell for Jumpman by moving along conveyor belts in unpredictable ways. Word of advice: Don't try to eat the pies. You'll end up spinning around with a halo over your head.

Introducing each of these repeating boards was an interstitial scene asking the all-important question "How High Can You Get?" Stacked-up renderings of loopy Donkey Kongs measured your progress, with each ape representing 25 meters (150m was the maximum height attainable). The point of this was incredibly unclear, but it gave you the pleasure of hearing that jaunty "How High Can You Get?" theme after finishing each level.

With its brightly animated characters and easy gameplay, Donkey Kong made an instant splash upon its release. Some naysayers at the Seattle-based Nintendo of America, founded by its Japanese



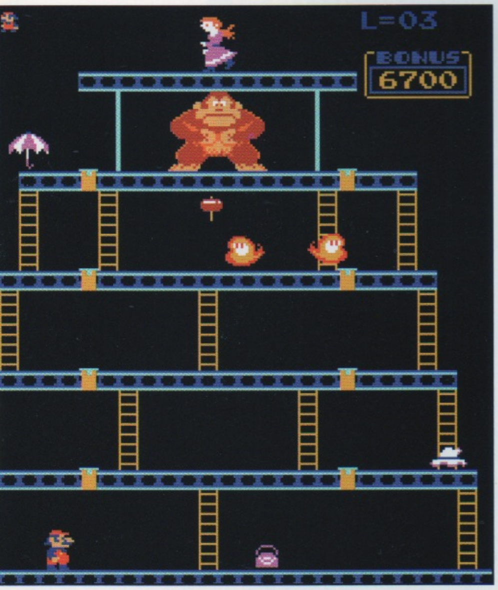


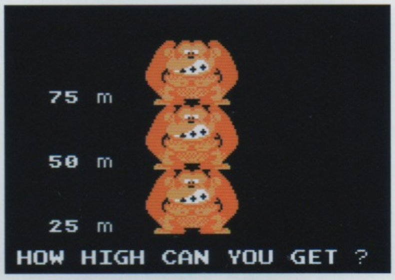
parent company in 1980, initially believed that the whimsical game would run the fledgling company into the ground. (One prominent employee almost quit in indignation.) But after Donkey Kong raked in $30 in quarters—or a whopping 120 plays—during its initial night of testing at the Seattle-area Spot Tavern, everybody involved had an inkling of what was about to happen. Nintendo of America eventually sold 62,000 machines in the United States. The rest is as legendary as Zelda.

The gorilla's share of Donkey Kong's and Nintendo's lasting success, of course, should be attributed to designer Shigeru Miyamoto, who joined the company in 1977 and was later assigned to help save its flailing coin-op video game division. Unbelievably, Donkey Kong was his very first idea, and the hits just kept on coming. With over a dozen titles in the Mario universe as of the end of 2000, Miyamoto is by far the most successful game designer of all time. Even tight-lidded Mario would have to take off his red hat to that.

Fancy Footwork

Try this: On the blue girder level, you can sidle up next to Donkey Kong and jump his feet at 100 points a hop. It doesn't really add up points-wise, but it's pretty fun to taunt Donkey Kong once in a while.





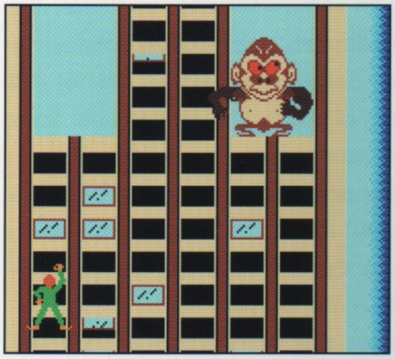
Below the Radar

Contrary to popular belief, Donkey Kong was not Nintendo's first attempt at arcade glory. That dubious honor belongs to the game Radarscope. Never heard of it? That's because Nintendo produced only 2000 of the repetitive shoot-'em-up, and sold even less. But the Radarscope cabinets were good for at least one thing: The left-over machines were all converted into Donkey Kongs. Plus they had that awesome flat top, tailor-made for putting drinks on.

JUMP
Nintendo
TOKEN

monkey shines

You weren't just monkeying around when you got busy on your favorite video game, but it was pretty hard to avoid going ape at least a little. The arcade contained more simians than your average zoo, and, with the rare exception of heroic Donkey Kong Junior, almost all of them were troublemakers. Can you remember the following star turns by our primate pals?

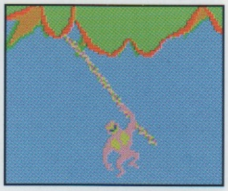


Crazy Climber (Taito, 1980)

As if scaling up the side of a skyscraper wasn't hard enough, poor Climber had to contend with a chest-beating King Kong wanna-be in the nose-bleed section of the structure. One faulty move and the big, dumb ape would pound the crazy crud out of you.

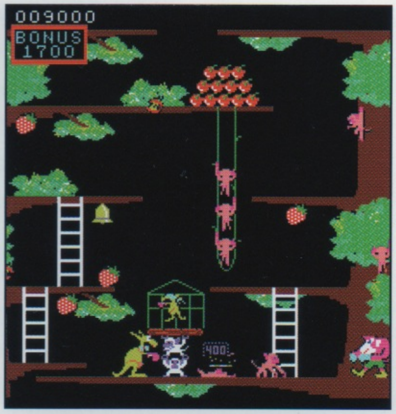
Jungle King (Taito, 1982)

Would you like to touch Taito's monkey? In the case of this Tarzan-inspired classic, your answer to that question should have been "no, thanks." Starting in the second round, a grunting gibbon bounced you off his vine if you didn't time your jump perfectly. How rude!



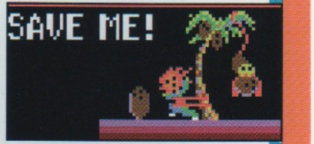
Kangaroo (Atari, 1982)

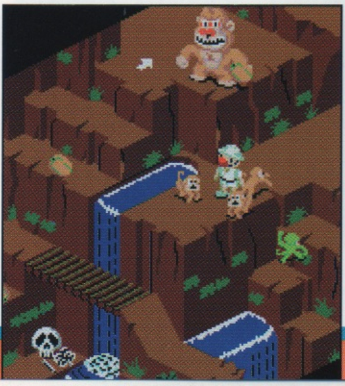
The animal kingdom had two rules in this jokey yet addictive Atari entry: 1) Don't kidnap and blindfold a mother kangaroo's joey, especially a mother kangaroo with boxing gloves, and 2) monkeys will always break rule number one. And what cruel primates they were, too. They encaged Junior at the top of the screen and gleefully chucked apples at the bouncing protagonist. Far more annoying was the prancing Grape Ape–like gorilla who kept stealing your gloves. No class!



Zoo Keeper (Taito, 1982)

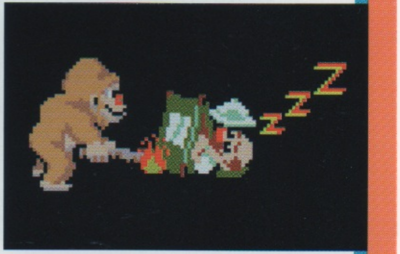
In this riotous but seldom heralded Taito release, Zeke the Zoo Keeper laid some serious brick in order to keep camels, snakes, elephants and lions in their cages. One of the bonus rounds required Zeke to rescue his sassy girlfriend from the clutches of an impish Curious George type, who casually tossed coconuts from the comfort of a palm tree. What a silly monkey.





Congo Bongo (Sega, 1983)

This memorable jungle-loving take-off on the Donkey Kong concept, which used the kooky 3-D perspective of Zaxxon, pitted an unexpecting explorer against a mischievous ape named Bongo. He commanded a tribe of meddling monkeys, hurled boulders at you, surrounded himself with rhino and snake guardians and generally put your dude in a world of hurt. He even set fire to your khaki-covered caboose!



Frogger

Why did the frog cross the road?

In the widely-appealing 1981 hit Frogger, the answer is undoubtedly "to get to the other side." A better question for the game's fans, however, might be "How many quarters did you spend to help the frog cross the road?" That can only be answered by thousands of Frogger fanatics and their accountants.

Like Pac-Man, the game appealed to an abnormally wide audience. Not only were the frogs uncharacteristically adorable, but even the least savvy video-game player could grasp Frogger's rudimentary joystick control and easy-going premise. Its realistic scenario of roads and rivers could have taken place right around the corner from your house; you could almost picture a cute little frog dodging traffic and leaping from log to log to get home in time for dinner. And the constant gleeful music accompaniment—which included such ditties as "Yankee Doodle Dandy"—proved maddeningly whistle-worthy and tailor-made for belting out in the shower.

Frogger also demanded repeat business due to its deceptive difficulty. The board never changed, but instead got incrementally harder from level to level. As the game progressed, the highway went from being populated by a few vehicles out for a Sunday drive to numerous cars and trucks driven by lead-footed hellions. On the river, logs became increasingly scarce and the entire zone soon teemed with frog-chomping otters, crocodiles and snakes. One false move and Kermit would be roadkill or a nice snack, with death manifesting itself by the placement of a final black 'X' across the frog's carcass. That's never good.

Docking a frog in one of the five bays at the top of the screen required some serious joystick mastery. The spaces were so narrow and the speed of the top layer of logs so quick that you often spoiled a successful crossing by running aground just shy of the safety area (especially when attempting to jump into the leftmost and rightmost bays). Of course, you might also be rewarded for a perfect landing with a tasty fly or get bonus points for escorting a female amphibian home on your back. As most arcade goers knew, this frog was a true prince.

Game: Frogger

Year: 1981

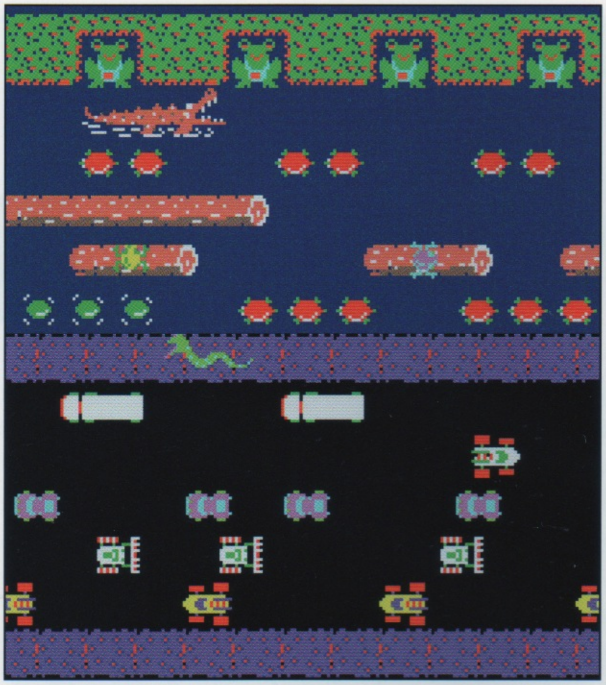
Manufacturer: Konami

Controls: Four-direction joystick

Plot: Scoot friendly frogs across a busy five-lane highway and over a perilous river to their peaceful lilypads

It's a Living

The marquee for Frogger depicted a male frog—wearing a red tie and carrying a briefcase—dashing in front of a huge tire. Talk about your killer commutes.

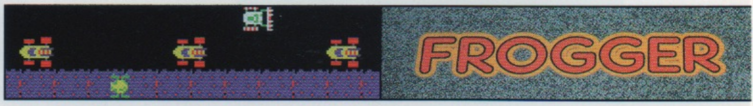


Power Croakers

Frogger, released by Sega/Gremlin (now just Sega), was designed by the clever Japanese firm, Konami. The still-thriving company was also responsible for Scramble (1981), Tutankham (1982), Time Pilot (1982), and, best of all, Track and Field (1983).

Froggy Went A-Courtin' Hollywood

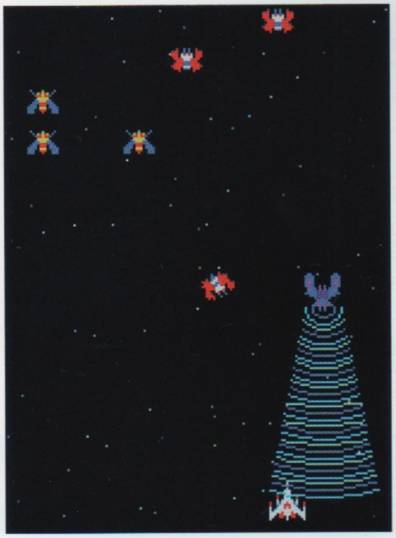
In 1983, *Frogger* began a one-season run on CBS as a part of the insanely awesome video-game extravaganza *Saturday Supercade.* The hero, imaginatively named Frogger, had been transformed into a reporter for the Swampy Gazette and, along with pals Fanny Frog and Shelly Turtle, solved newsworthy mysteries. It was pretty annoying. Much more recently, an episode from *Seinfeld's* final season featured George Costanza plotting to rescue a Frogger machine—which still had his ten-year-old high score 860,630 on it—from his old pizza parlor hangout. To get the game home, he had to usher it across a busy Queens boulevard. Hilariously, the scene used an overhead view like that in the game, and showed George hopping back and forth through the traffic while the jaunty Frogger theme song played. Just as he was about to reach the other side, a semi truck barreled into the machine. The horror!



Galaga

Whether you pronounce the game "guh-LAH-guh" or "GAL-uh-guh", the name of Midway's high-flying sequel to the 1979 classic Galaxian has probably never strayed too far from your lips. Galaga was, quite simply, one of the most addictive video games ever created, and was far and away the most taxing on your shooting forearm. Those insect-like ships just kept on coming, and you loved it no matter how painful the cramp.

Your mission, as in Galaxian, was to destroy a methodical and faceless armada of colorful alien spacecraft by deftly maneuvering your Galaxip fighter at the bottom of the screen. These enemy ships, however, were faster, fiercer and more plentiful—well more than one tiny ship could handle. Unless you could somehow beef up you firepower, you might as well try your luck at Asteroids.



And such was Galaga's genius. Through a revolutionary feature, you could not only control one ship but blast away on the armada with two friggin' fighters. Occasionally, certain enemy vessels would swoop down and direct a tractor beam toward the bottom of the screen; if you entered the energy field your fighter would twirl upwards at the Galaga and be captured. There followed a tense moment when you needed to nail the bastard that was dragging your man but avoid shooting your own ship—no small task. Indeed, the only thing more bile-producing than killing one of your own captured guys was losing your last life while one of your birds was trapped above, thereby ending your game in an emasculating whimper.

Now came the fun part: With the tandem hookup, you became quite nearly invincible. Behold the power! Your right hand a-blur on the fire button, you could now launch double the number of shots, making it a snap to whittle down the armada before it even had a chance to move into formation. Of course, you got chunkier, too, and avoiding the rapid-fire raiders as they encroached on your airspace proved increasingly difficult. Particularly tricky were those little bee-shaped buggers who looped underneath your ship and back upwards; some of them even morphed into a squadron of three kamikaze Galaxian flagships. Yikes!

While the blitzkrieg never ceased, your dynamic duo still had the edge in space supremacy. And the double ship was almost required for the skill-testing Challenging

Game: Galaga

Year: 1981

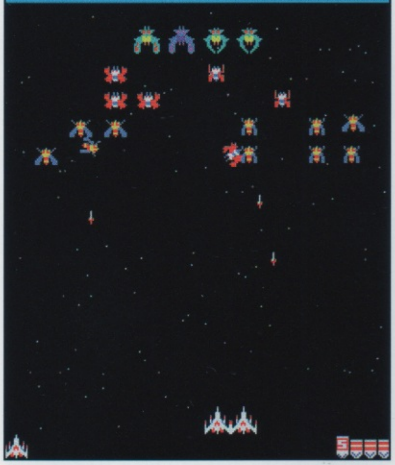
Manufacturer: Midway

Controls: Two-direction joystick, fire button

Plot: Ward off the evil, unceasing Galaga armada and prove yourself in the Challenging Stages to join the list of Galactic Heroes

Crossed Up

Some Galaga fanatics, usually lefties, employed an unorthodox cross-handed hold on the controls, forming an "X" with their forearms. They'd man the left-side joystick with their right hand and fire with their left. Truly, truly disturbing.



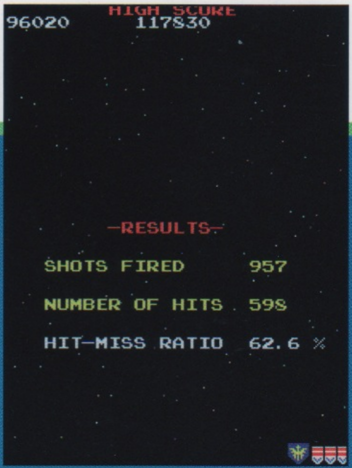
Stages, the intermittent respites you got from the game's blazing action. On these levels, you needed to shoot 40 ships moving in easy-to-memorize formations in order to receive the big bonus of 10,000 points and be treated to a song of great joy. (More often, though, you'd miss one or two of them and bang your hand on the fire button in great anger.)

Along with fellow sequel Ms. Pac-Man, Galaga heads the short list of "Classic Games Most Likely to Be Found at Your Local Bar in 2001." And while that's not too hard to understand, it's amazing that no one's figured out how to pronounce Galaga after all these years.

MIDWAY
Galaga
MIDWAY
Galaga
MOVE
FIRE

Stats Entertainment

One of the best features of Galaga was that geeky calculation table at the end of the game that told you how many of your shots had hit a target. While it was impossible to play a normal game without missing at least once, some hot shots showed off by using one bullet to pick off two enemy ships as they crossed paths. Then they'd retire early with a 200 percent firing ratio. Cool trick, but a wasted quarter just the same.

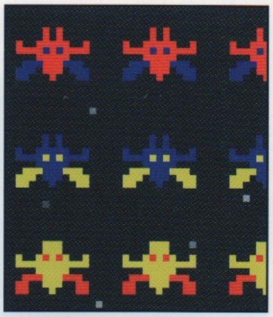


```
96020      HIGH SCORE
            117830

        -RESULTS-

SHOTS FIRED         957
NUMBER OF HITS      598
HIT-MISS RATIO      62.6 %
```

Gorf



"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Those taunting chuckles, loudly uttered by a sassy intergalactic robotic horde, lured countless fledgling space warriors to Midway's groundbreaking 1981 release Gorf just to shut the darn thing up. The back-talking buckets of bolts exploited Gorf's top-notch voice synthesizer to the fullest, and their metallic intonations could be heard above the din of any arcade. But what really caused so many players to commit serial Gorfage was that its multi-mission format made it like five, five, five games in one. You simply got more bang for your quarter of a buck.

If only the stupid 'Gorfian consciousness' would have shut the heck up, you might have noticed how inventive and challenging the game was. Sure, two of your five missions were complete rehashes of Space Invaders and Galaxian, Midway's two biggest hits to that point. Gorf paved the way for slightly later releases such as Donkey Kong by giving you multiple adventures for a quarter and took cabinet design to new heights with its cool Buck Rogers-style trigger joystick (subsequently used in Midway's Tron). For an all-too-brief moment, these innovations helped Gorf hold its own against arcade heavyweights like Defender and Pac-Man.

Admittedly, it was tricky getting the hang of the three Gorf-specific missions, which you needed to do in order to get promoted up the ranks of the Interstellar Space Force. You started off as a lowly space cadet, but your hard work was rewarded every time you destroyed the wimpy-looking Gorf flagship (see mission chart). A lighted chart directly above and to the right of the control panel told you the rank you held, but you may as well have just listened to the Gorf. It frequently name-checked your position in the Space Force, sometimes going so far as to say "Bad move, Space

Game: Gorf

Year: 1981

Manufacturer: Midway

Controls: Eight-direction joystick, fire trigger

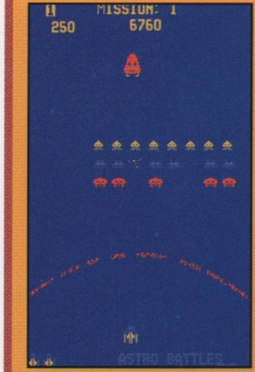
Plot: Stop the familiar-looking Gorfian robot empire and be promoted through the ranks of the Interstellar Space Force

Major milestone: First game with multiple levels (Note: Gorf came out before Donkey Kong)

The Words and Wisdom of Gorf

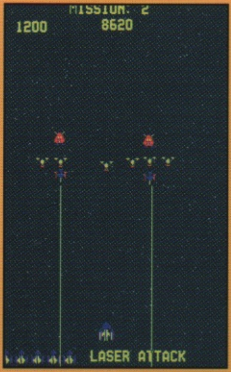
Insert coin
I devour coins!
Long live Gorf!
Gorfian Robots, attack, attack!
Gorfians take no prisoners!
Prepare to be annihilated, [your rank here]
Bad move, [your rank here]!
Robot warriors, seek and destroy the [your rank here]!
Your end draws near, [your rank here]!
I am the Gorfian Empire!
You will meet a Gorfian doom!
My Gorfian robots are unbeatable!
I am the Gorfian consciousness!
Another enemy ship destroyed!
Survival is impossible, [your rank here]!
All hail the supreme Gorfian Empire!
Too bad, [your rank here]!
For hitting my flag ship, you have been promoted to [rank]!
Nice shot! You have been promoted to [your rank here]!
Next time will be harder, but for now you have been promoted to [rank]!
In the Gorfian Chronicles, you have been promoted to [rank]!
Some galactic defender you are, [your rank here]!
Ha, ha, ha, ha!
Gorfians conquer another galaxy!
Try again!

The Five Missions of Gorf


MISSION: 1
250
6760
ASTRO BATTLES

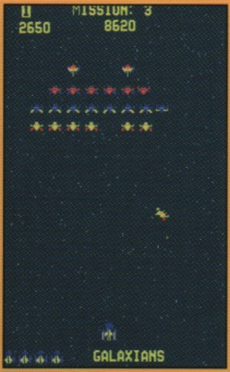
1. Astro Battles

Uh, shouldn't that be Space Invaders? Besides the bouncing red gumdrop dude, this level was a dead ringer.


MISSION: 2
1200
8620
LASER ATTACK

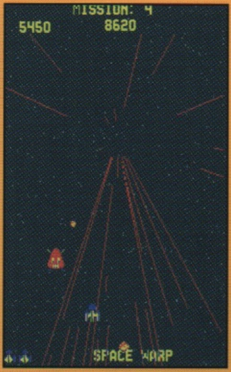
2. Laser Attack

You faced two squadrons of ships, each guarded by a fighter that blew a long laser strand out of its nose


MISSION: 3
2650
8620
GALAXIANS

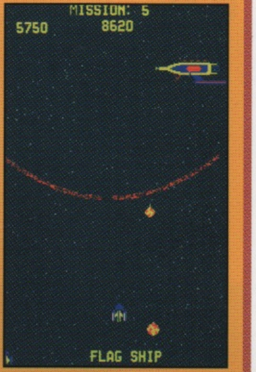
3. Galaxians

Big whoop: You took on the too-familiar Galaxian space armada


MISSION: 4
5450
8620
SPACE WARP

4. Space Warp

From a worm hole, swirling ships spewed fire bombs down at you


MISSION: 5
5750
8620
FLAG SHIP

5. Flag Ship

To earn your promo tion, you attemped to take out the heavily shielded mother ship while avoiding deadly shrapnel and torpedoes

MIDWAY
GORF
a Bally co.

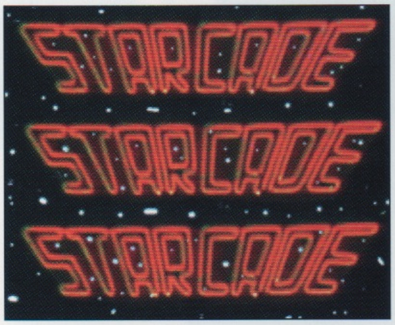
Colonel." Yo, Gorf—if you don't have anything nice to say, just don't say it.

What initially attracted people to the game may also have been the broom that shooed them away. The Gorf (which was an acronym for Galactic Orbiting Robot Force) had a bigger vocabulary than Gary Coleman and could be more annoying than Charo.

The Rankings in the Interstellar Space Force

Space Cadet (missions 1 through 5)
Space Captain (6-10)
Space Colonel (11-15)
Space General (16-20)
Space Warrior (21-25)
Space Avenger (26 and above)

game show
starcade



Mike daddy: Genial host Geoff Edwards helped young contestants deal with the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat

If Nielsen ever produced a report on which non-primetime TV program was the most popular among video-game fanatics between the years 1981 and 1984 in households that carried TBS Superstation, chances are that the name at the top of the list would be *Starcade*. The concept of the series was almost too beautiful: a half-hour game show where two kids squared off against each other on the latest arcade releases. That could be you up there!

Of course, no one watched *Starcade* to see which of the contestants got to take home a Sinistar machine; it was all about the games. They were drawn from a limitless pool of releases from nearly every manufacturer, and during its three years everything from Amidar to Zoo Keeper took a bow on Starcade's stage. You'd never seen or played many of the games, such as hard-to-find titles Black Widow or Munch Mobile. It made for the perfect companion to your *Video Games Magazine* subscription.

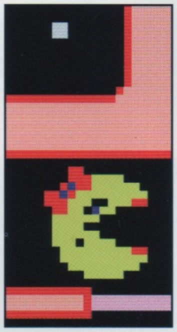
The best part of *Starcade,* though, was hooting and hollering at the sometimes novice contestants. When not answering simple trivia questions (The object of the game BurgerTime was to: a) build a burger or b) eat as many burgers as you can?), the players went for points on a tasty selection of titles. If someone made a bad move on, say, Super Pac-Man, you let the screen know about it with derisive catcalls. If one of them pulled off a move you'd never thought of, you slapped your head like an actor in a V-8 commercial and tried it out the next day at the arcade. In that sense, *Starcade* proved that television could be a skillful teacher.

Celluloid Nightmares

A disturbing trend in the 1990s saw Hollywood adapting popular video games (*Mortal Kombat, Mario Bros., Street Fighter*) into incredibly awful movies. Thankfully, the following travesties based on classic games never found their way into theaters:

Ms. Pac-Man

Like Norma Rae before her, the jaundiced-stricken Ms. Pac-Man (played by Divine) forms a union to change unfair workplace practices, most notably the one restricting her god-given right to binge on the job. John Belushi costars as her supportive husband Pac-Man; John Waters directs.



The Chuck E. Cheese Story

Cheerful rodent Chuck (Corey Haim) and his gruff pal Jasper T. Jowls (Corey Feldman) register their ensemble for the Battle of the Bands contest to save their favorite eating place from being taken over by its chief rival, ShowBiz Pizza. Of course, ShowBiz's bear mascot Billy Bob Brockali (Gene Hackman) and his Rock-afire Explosion band try to sabotage Mr. Cheese's set, which includes plenty of cornpone tunes and more than one joke about the venue's waitstaff.

Frogger

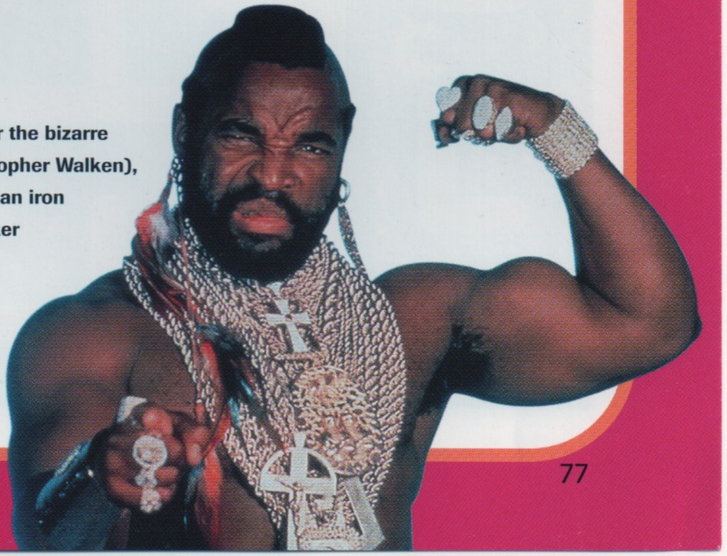
In this fanciful precursor to Harold Ramis's dark comedy *Groundhog Day,* Sisyphus Hopper (Bill Murray) is clearly stuck in a rut: He wakes up every morning to the same chirpy song, crosses the same busy street and jumps over the same shaky logs to get to his dingy riverside research station. It takes a sexy Department of Natural Resources surveyor (Andie McDowell) to inspire him to break the cycle and become a real prince.

Donkey Kong Junior

In this heartwarming story for all ages, a sarcastic ape-boy named Junior (played by Gary Coleman) attempts to thwart the evil Italian plumber (Danny DeVito) who has enslaved his indomitable papa, Donkey Kong (Mr. T). Potential catchphrase: "Whatchootalkin 'bout, Mario!?"

Qix: The Force Within

Director David Lynch dares you to enter the bizarre world of the greedy warlord Qix (Christopher Walken), who rules over his desolate realm with an iron hand. A humble carpenter named Marker (Kyle MacLachlan) reluctantly starts a revolution when it is revealed that he is the son of the fabled king Taito and rightful heir to the throne.



MS. PAC-MAN

Game: Ms. Pac-Man

Year: 1981

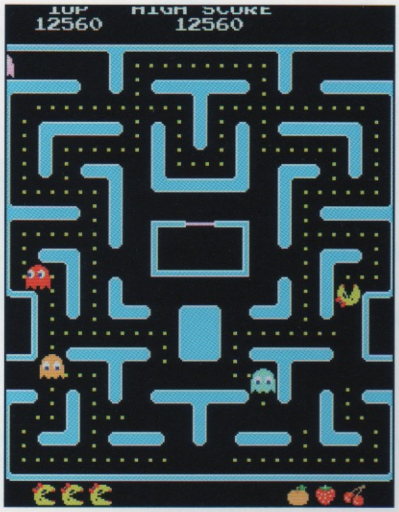
Manufacturer: Midway

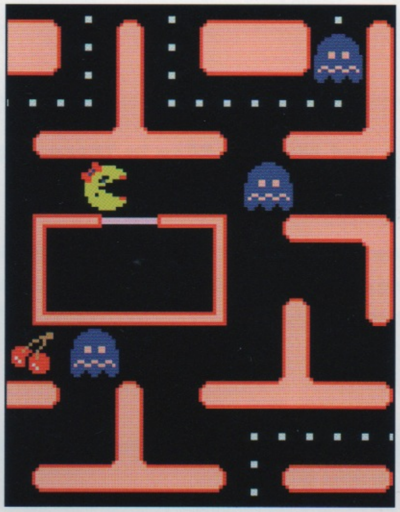
Controls: Four-direction joystick

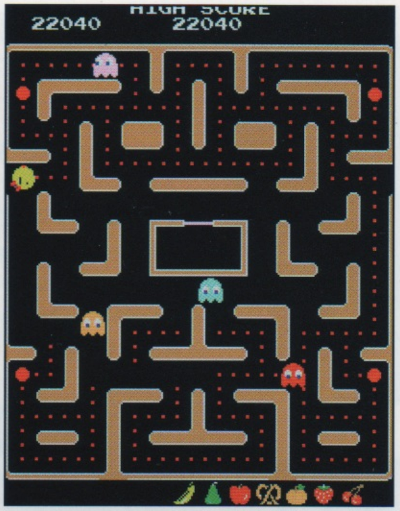
Plot: Use your feminine wiles to evade four cheeky ghost monsters and gorge on tasty dots, energy pills and snack foods

Major milestone: First game to star a female character

MS. PAC-MAN
MIDWAY
MS. PAC-MAN





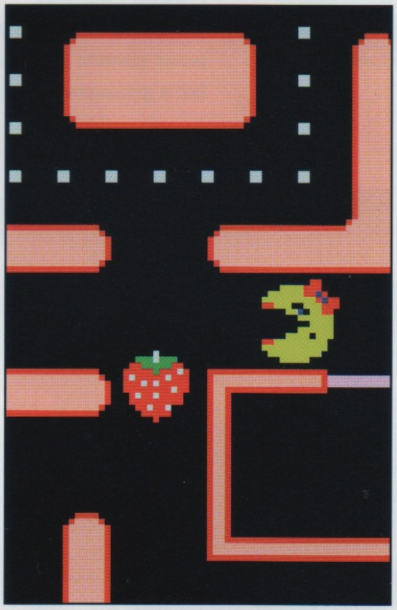


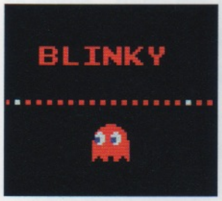
A good arcade sequel is hard to find.

In the rare case of Ms. Pac-Man, however, Midway not only came close to duplicating the cha-ching of its wildly successful Pac-Man, but also improved on the pellet-chomping precursor's heart-stopping gameplay to create the industry's first female role model.

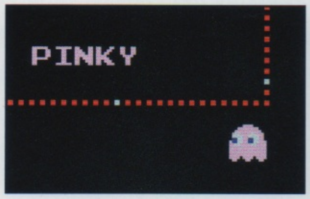
Of course, the game's success depended mostly on how kindly the largely male posse of arcade denizens would take to its title character: the gussied up and vaguely snooty girly Pac (that's Ms. Pac-Man to you!). With her red hair bow and caked-on eyeliner and lipstick, Ms. Pac-Man was slightly sexy, extremely feminine, and absolutely sassy. The game screamed "Play me!" to women longing for a character who could kick butt but also look good doing it. Midway needed the guys, too, though, and was betting a fortune's worth of quarters that even the most testosterone-fueled stud would want to assume the role of a girl, a scenario that had never before been attempted at the arcade.

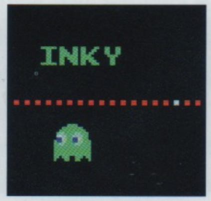
But darn it if the game didn't kick Pac-Man's bulbous yellow ass. Instead of one increasingly difficult maze, you got four. Each sported crazier twists

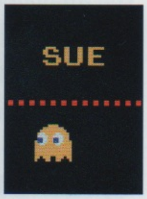




supporting characters







MS. PAC-MAN
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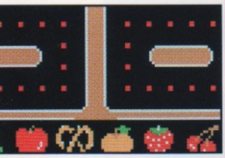


The Tale of Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man in Three Acts:

Act I—They Meet

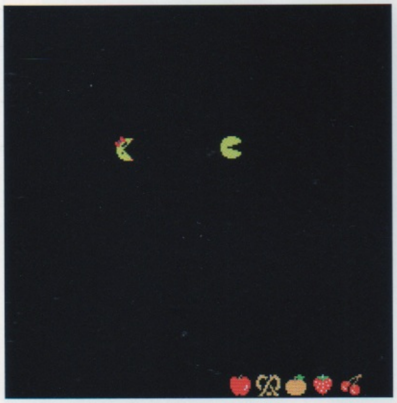
Cue sickly sweet nickelodeon music. Pursued by Pinky, Ms. Pac-Man scoots across the screen. Ditto Pac-Man, who is being dogged by Inky. Soon, our two jaundiced heroes reappear and, just as the shadowy brutes are about to pounce, they dodge upwards and create a ghost sandwich. Love is in the air.

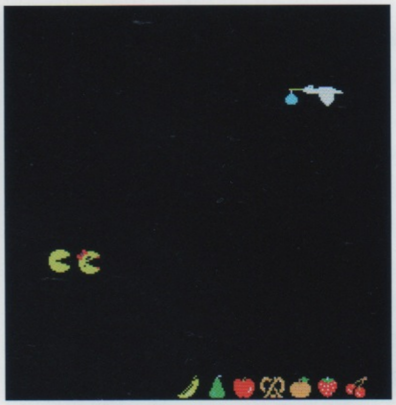
Act II—The Chase

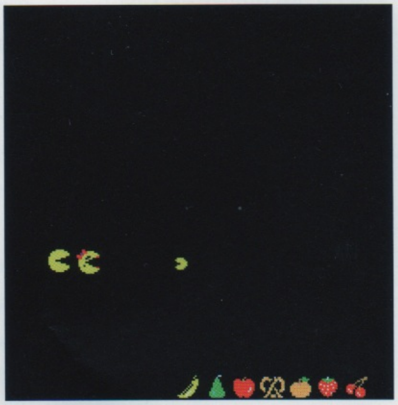
The dynamic duo really dig each other now. Witness this montage of Ms Pac-Man and Pac-Man chasing after each other like dogs in heat.

Act III—Junior

Lickety-split, Junior Pac-Man arrives on the scene. A Vlassic-like stork delivers the brat to the proud parents (who must have tied the knot off-camera). There's great joy in Pac-Land today, but a gruesomely difficult endgame ahead. Prepare to die.

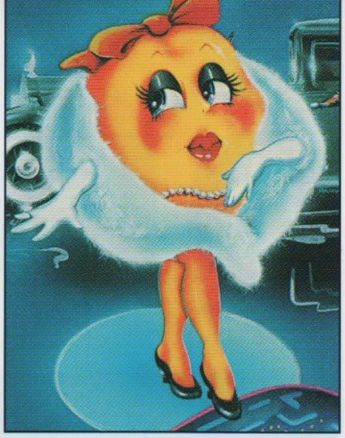






and turns, favoring the ghosts (all but one, nicknamed Sue, were holdovers from Pac-Man). Rather than collect stationary bonus goodies, Ms. Pac-Man had to hunt down bouncing, thumping fruit (and a salty pretzel for some carbs). The animated scenes—which were arguably too cutesy—brought back that dot-scarfing piehead Pac-Man , albeit as a love-struck chump wooing a chick who could definitely hold her own at any eating contest in Pac-Land. Much to Midway's delight, boys everywhere were more than happy to put on the mascara and start gobbling.

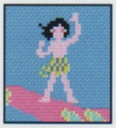
Nowadays, you're more likely to come across a Ms. Pac-Man machine sitting in the corner of a bar than any other classic game. It's the ultimate testament to the Ms. Pac-Man's massive cross-over—not to mention cross-dressing—appeal. Chalk one up for the ladies.



video game fashion

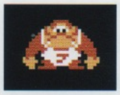
With her sporty red hair ribbon, Ms. Pac-Man munched on ghost monsters without losing her commendable feminine flair. *Arcade Fever* asked her to single out the yums and yucks of video-game fashion.

yums



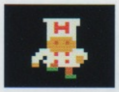
Jungle King's tiger print loin cloth

Ms. Pac-Man says: "Skimpy, yes, but if you've got gams like those, flaunt 'em. And I could go wokka-wokka over his tush!"



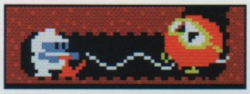
Donkey Kong Junior's "J" uniform

Ms. Pac-Man says: "J is for Just delish. That's one sartorially savvy simian!"



Chef Peter Pepper's hat

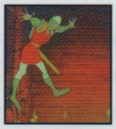
Ms. Pac-Man says: "Peter's burgers are the absolute yummiest, especially with egg. Nice hat, too."



Dig Dug's red pump

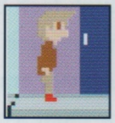
Ms. Pac-Man says: "That's just a nice looking pump."

yucks



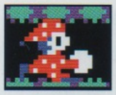
Dirk the Daring's tunic

Ms. Pac-Man says: "They must call him daring because he's willing to wear such an ugly red frock. Dirk is a fashion jerk!"



Elevator Action guy's red boots

Ms. Pac-Man says: "Is this suedehead color blind? But he looks German. The red boots are okay only if he's German."



Mr. Do's clown suit

Ms. Pac-Man says: "Mr. Do should be called Mr. Don't! Send in the clowns–to Bloomingdales!"

Einstein's Arcade Monsters?

Quick: What's the best book ever written by a Booker Prize–nominated author? In the world of *Arcade Fever,* it has to be the little-remembered 1982 tribute *Invasion of the Space Invaders,* gushingly penned by none other than esteemed British novelist Martin Amis. That's not all: The long out-of-print title also features a brief introduction by self-proclaimed Missile Command fanatic Steven Spielberg. Even the rich and famous, it seems, fell victim to the awesome power of video games.

The book–subtitled, An Addict's Guide to Battle Tactics, Big Scores and the Best Machines–is really nothing more than a strategy tutorial for the popular arcade and home releases of the day, albeit one far more creatively written than others. He refers to the tunnel in Pac-Man as "Wraparound Avenue", cheerfully reports on the rash of quarter-related crimes throughout Britain and riffs on his frequent late-night arcade runs. And check out this Amis zinger from the Asteroids pages: "Don't go mad and reduce the whole screen to rubble–you'll find yourself dodging bricks, and will be stoned to death like an Iranian rapist.

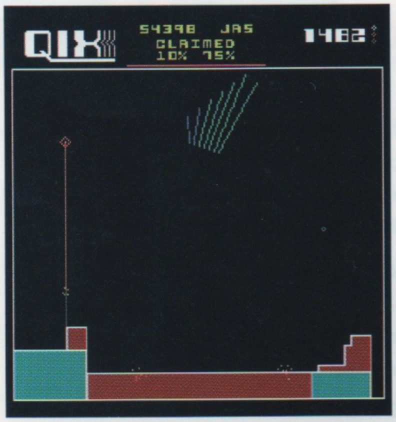
Apart from such bon mots, *Invasion* is a must read for the eloquence in which the Oxford-schooled author of *London Fields* and *The Information* describes his discovery of and subsequent dependency on the drug known as Space Invaders. Amis's intensity for the subject matter even arouses a modicum of pity from Spielberg, who is photographed next to his own Missile Command machine, on which he boasts a top score of over 500,000 points. Amis refers to addicts such as himself "triffids" and "Invadees", and speculates that there may, alas, be no cure. He couldn't have been more right.

QIX

Making wonderful use of the letter "q", Taito's no-frills Qix skittered into arcades in 1981, taking budding artists by storm. Your goal was simply to confine the amorphous and quite colorful Qix (pronounced "kicks," as in "kicks ass") to as small an area as geometrically possible, but the game was almost secondary to the thrill of drawing little oddly shaped boxes all over the place. Playing Qix was like fooling around on a high-tech Etch-a-Sketch, where the malevolent Qix itself acted as the ultimate eraser.

The game's biggest sweaty-palms moment came when you tried to bite off more than you could chew. Defying all logic, you'd bolt across the playing field, hoping to cordon off 20, 25, even 45 percent of the board in one mad dash. The strange Qix—described in a Taito flyer as a "spinning helix," whatever the heck that is—usually stopped you dead in your tracks. Your doom was even more likely sealed if you were greedy enough to use the points-yielding but Rusty Staub–like "slow" button to stake your claim.

When you did get nabbed by the titular presence, which flitted about unpredictably like a swarm of killer bees, a loud echoing *brrrrrong* rang out, scaring the bejeezus out of you. (The Qix, it should be mentioned, sounded an awful lot like a light saber.) But such risks were the only way to rack up any real points and add your initials to the list of elite "Qix Kickers." For serious Qix artistes, it was just like signing a canvas.



Triple Word Score

If Qix were an actual word, Scrabble players could have a field day. A "q" is worth 10 points and an "x" is worth 8, two of the highest-scoring letters in the game.

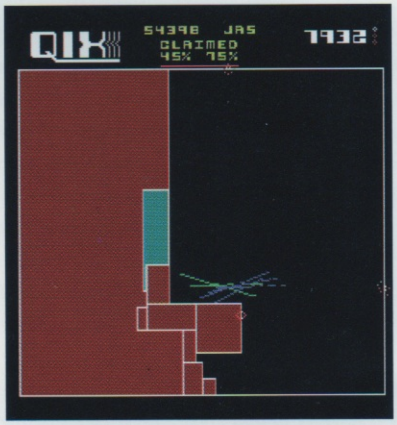
Game: Qix

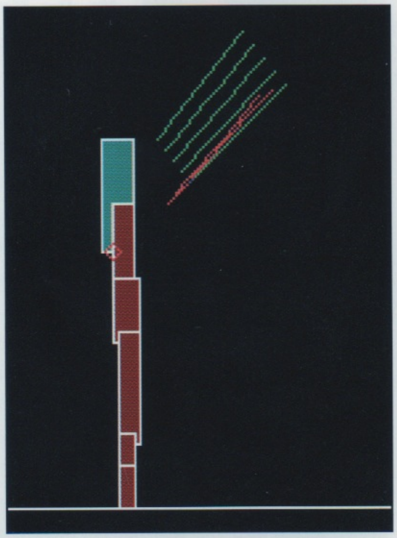
Year: 1981

Manufacturer: Taito

Controls: Four-direction joystick, "fast" and "slow" buttons

Plot: Drawing colorful boxes with your trusty Marker, fill in at least 75 percent of a rectangular board while avoiding the deadly Qix and its fiery minions



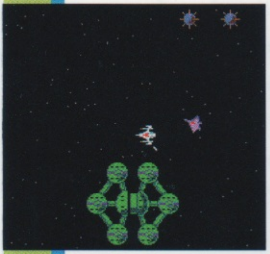


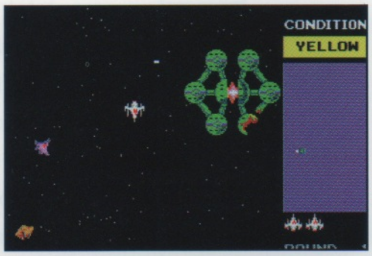
Cereal Number

General Mills never sued Taito for using the name Qix, which sounds eerily similar to its popular breakfast cereal Kix. One possible reason that GM looked the other way: The video game, while kid-tested, was decidedly not mother-approved.

Taxing titles

The name Qix deftly surfed the Big Kahuna between smart and stupid. Here are ten games that totally wiped out:





Bosconian (Midway, 1981)

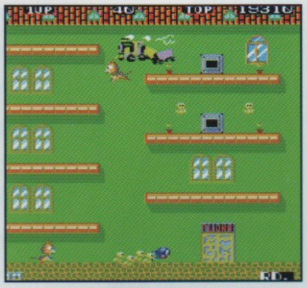
A fast-action space shooter a la Galaga, the Namco-designed Bosconian incongruously sounded like a stuffy Victorian novel. The programmer of the game, in which you had to destroy green hexagonal enemy space stations, could only have been a disgruntled English major.

Bump 'n' Jump (Midway, 1982)

The object of this addictive Data East–designed game? To bump and jump into other cars. Other clever titles might have been Beep 'n' Leap and Plop 'n' Hop.

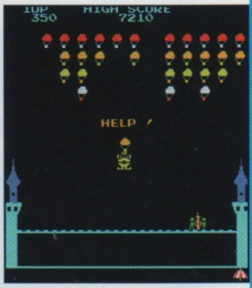
Flicky (Midway/Sega 1984)

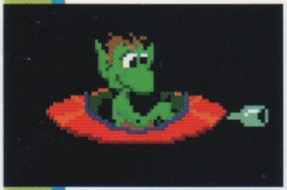
This ultra-obscure Midway-Sega team-up starred a mother blue jay named Flicky, who chucked stuff at cats intent on pawing her chicks. Unfortunately, the title evoked the grody image of pick 'em and flick 'em rather than the intended cutesy nickname of a dead-eye bird.



King and Balloon (Namco, 1980)

In this graphically-challenged Galaxian clone, you protected an effeminate king who kept saying "Help! Help!" as he was hijacked by—you guessed it—evil balloons. Whoever coined the title must have been sucking some serious helium.





Kozmik Krooz'r (Midway, 1982)

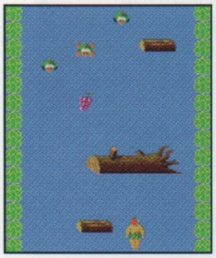
Arguably the lamest of all the cutesy characters invented for video games, the plucky alien Krooz'r looked like something Q*bert ate and dropped. The apostrophe-rich spelling of his name only made him less endearing to the masses.

Make Trax (Williams Electronics, 1981)

You controlled a paint brush and painted roadways in this ultra-moronic 1981 Williams entry. Most players made "trax" to any other nearby video game.

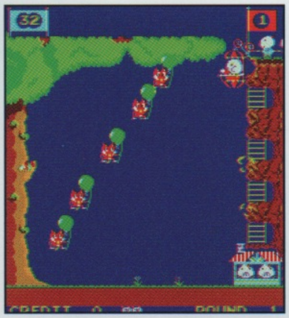
Nibbler (Rock-Ola, 1983)

As the insatiable serpent Nibbler, you gobbled up scraps of white goo and got more and more elongated. Both the name and the game gave people Pepto Bismol–worthy indigestion.



Swimmer (Tehkan, 1982)

Believe it or not, Swimmer took place entirely on dry land. Uh, just kidding. This head-slappingly stupid game starred an ugly blob of a human who excelled at the breast stroke, but for some reason was attempting to navigate a perilous river. Ever heard of a pool?



Pooyan (Stern, 1982)

It's obvious that the Konami-designed Pooyan, in which you were a mother pig defending her brood from a pack of intelligent wolves, is the worst-named game of all time. Pooyan may mean something in Japan, but in the western world it just sounds nasty.

Zzyzzyxx (Cinematronics, 1982)

The ultimate in video games (alphabetically speaking, that is), the color vector shoot-'em-up Zzyzzyxx has to be disqualified for its double use of "y" as a vowel.

TEMPEST
1
TOKEN

Tempest

Tempest didn't directly reference Shakespeare's final comedy with its "the"-less title, but it may as well have. The reason: When many people first took a gander at Atari's brightly-colored vector-graphic release in 1981, they made like the Bard's dumbstruck Miranda and went, "O brave new world that has such a video game in't!" Compared to the standard black-and-white and cartoonish fare available, the bad-ass Tempest seemed like something from another galaxy.

Of course, Shakespeare would have been disappointed by the

Game: Tempest

Year: 1981

Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Two-direction rotary dial, fire button, "superzap" button

Plot: Spider-walk around oddly shaped playing surfaces blasting malevolent geometric shapes and evading deadly spikes

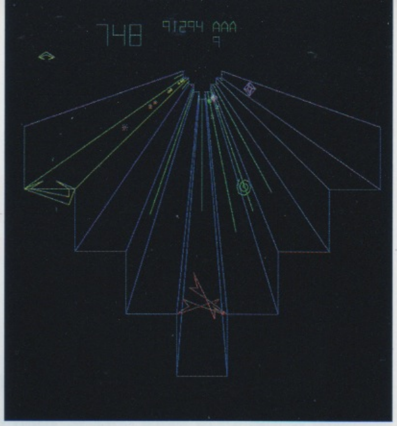
Major milestone: Atari's first color vector game

game's backstory. Looking at the cabinet itself, you'd have thought the game would concern the grimacing aliens that were illustrated on the marquee. Instead, the space goons turned out to be nothing more than a few faceless colored lines: flip-flopping red brackets, unfurling green spikes and jittery static balls. Not scary. And what the heck was that crab-like thingamajig you were piloting? It looked like Pac-Man with a Pepto Bismol hangover.

But Tempest certainly took no guff from anybody. As the spidery yellow dude, your mission was to warp from level to level after shooting everything that moved. No matter how simply those "aliens" were drawn, you had a heck of a time trying to kill them all. The tenacious red flip-flops would crawl their way up the long chutes that comprised each differently shaped playing field and then chase your ship as it spun around the outer edge of the ribbed structure. If one touched you, it would latch on to you and drag you back toward its home base for some vile purpose. Even when you rid a particular level of the persistent red guys, you would be shish kebobbed if you failed to follow very specific instructions: "Avoid Spikes."

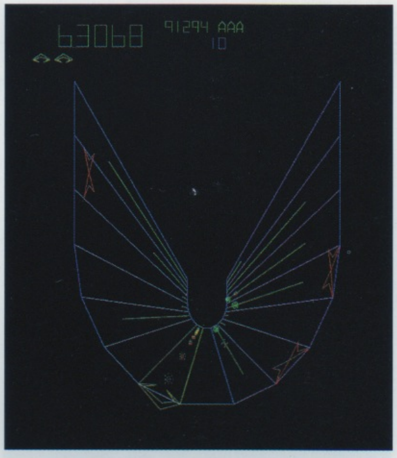
Most novice players employed absolutely no strategy whatsoever, opting instead just to rotate wildly around the playing field with their finger constantly on the fire button. Their panic increased as the flip-flops closed in on them and they would quickly waste the allotted two doses of "superzap," the feature that eliminated any alien on the screen. Ultimately they were spike fodder. The few and the proud who managed to land on the high-score board were 'rewarded' with a fireworks display so lame it had to have been designed by a recent graduate of Programming 101.

Like other heavily testosterone-charged games of the day, Tempest punished the recreational player. A typical round for the uninitiated could be over in as little as twenty seconds, a fact that probably discouraged repeat business. But those that got hooked found out that the game took the "no rest for the weary" mentality of Defender, threw in a whole bunch of cool lightsaberesque sound effects and added the addictive Asteroids-like thrill of blasting oddly-shaped objects. The truly obsessed saw those flip-flop things in their sleep in a way that may not have been equaled until Tetris came along. To paraphrase Shakespeare, the tempestuous aliens were such stuff as dreams were made on.



Hail to the Vector

Tempest may have been Atari's first game to use color vector graphics, but that awesome technology first showed up in the 1979 Cinematronics release Warrior. The best demonstration of Tempest's new power came during the attract mode when the game's logo spun brilliantly around the screen. It was like that old "Special" display that CBS used to roll out before primetime holiday shows, except without the bongo accompaniment.



Fun Fact

Tempest featured 96 differently shaped playing fields, all of which looked like they were designed using one of those Spirograph drawing mechanisms that kids used to love.

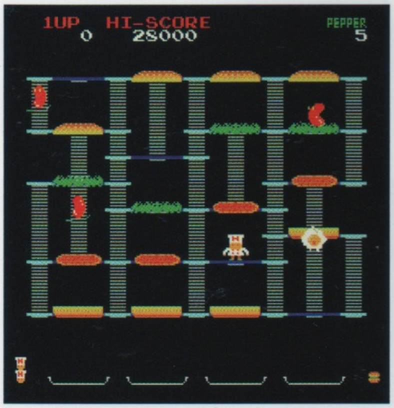
BurgerTime

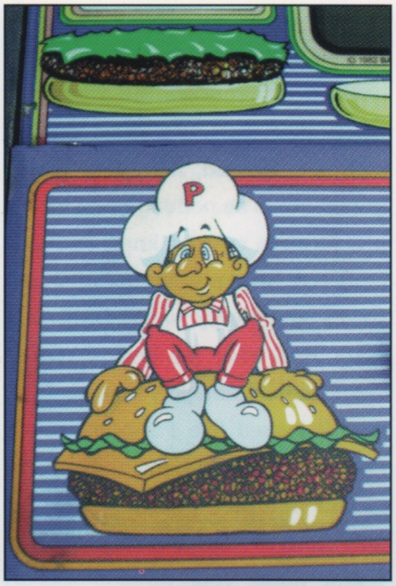
How do you take your burger? If you like it with a side of excitement and a whole lot of extra cheese, then you were probably a fan of the 1982 gustatory delight BurgerTime. The Midway classic perfectly exaggerated the thrills, spills, and bellyaches of kitchen work, and was quite possibly the first game to make your stomach growl. Mmm. . .meat.

The game pitted rotund gourmand Peter Pepper against Mssrs. Hot Dog, Pickle and Egg, supersized foodstuffs gone berzerk. To forestall his inevitable demise and advance to another level, the chef hastily constructed four giant hamburgers from non-aggressive ingredients stacked throughout his crazy kitchen. To do this, he violated just about every health code in the book by trampling across the tops of sesame-seed buns, lettuce and patties. It was enough to make you want to become a vegetarian.

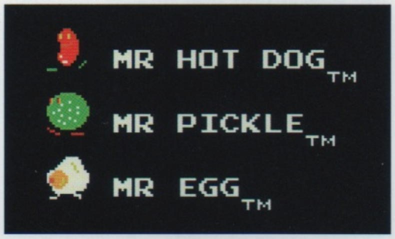
Peter could only stop the rebellious victuals with a well-aimed dash of pepper. Though the instructions clearly state "Do not waste your pepper", you more likely threw the spice with abandon because that was the only way to freeze your wiggling enemies in their tracks (were they sneezing?). If you dosed them when they were on top of a bun and then ran across it, the extra weight forced the bun all the way down the multi-leveled kitchen and onto an expectant platter. Of course, you often threw the pepper in the wrong direction or ran out of your weapon at a crucial time, and Chef Pepper would become the meal.

Meanwhile, a few words about our plus-size hero are necessary. First of all, he was so fat that his ass took up two zip codes. You just knew he was scarfing down some of the profits. And what was the deal with his hat? The letter "H" was stitched on its front, but wasn't his name Peter Pepper? Even more confusingly, the Midway cabinet sported a rendering of a slimmed-down Pepper with a "P" on his hat. What's his beef? The world may never know whether the initial stood for "hero" or "hamburger," but one thing is imminently clear: Whoever created this game had a nasty case of indigestion.





Meet Your Enemies



MR HOT DOG TM

MR PICKLE TM

MR EGG TM

Game: BurgerTime

Year: 1982

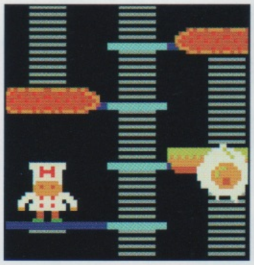
Manufacturer: Midway

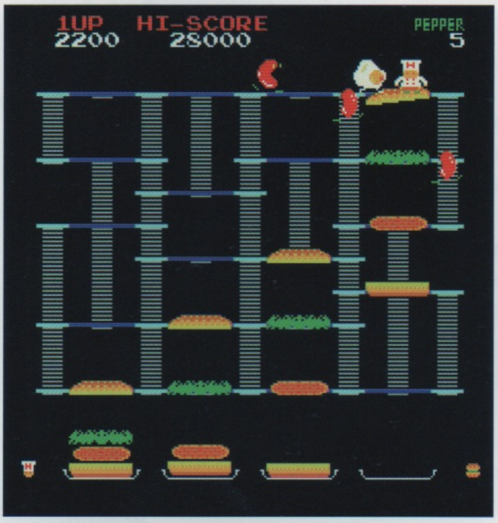
Controls: Four-direction joystick, "pepper" button

Plot: As Chef Peter Pepper, assemble tasty burgers while escaping the clutches of the deliciously dangerous Mr. Hot Dog, Mr. Pickle and Mr. Egg.

Ad Rock

Anyone who can remember the live-action commercial for Mattel Electronics's home version of BurgerTime is truly lucky. With cheesy '80s synth music playing, a voice-over nicely sums up the game's premise: "Introducing BurgerTime, the home video game where you're a chef trying to make hamburgers. There's just one problem: The food is trying to make hamburger out of you!" The ad shows two kids peeking through a restaurant window as a portly chef is chased around by actors dressed up as pickles, hot dogs and eggs. The spot ends when Mr. Hot Dog, wielding a disturbing German accent, says, "We are closed now!" and rudely shuts the window.



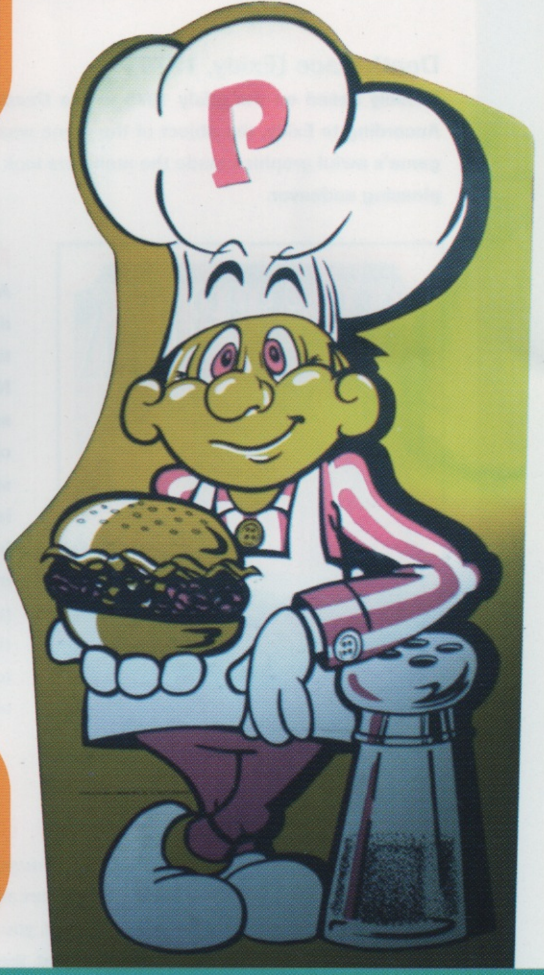


Beast From The East

While manufactured in America by Midway, BurgerTIme was grilled up by the Japanese company Data East. The firm's other hits include the car-smashing classic Bump 'n' Jump (1982), the repetitive but seminal Tag Team Wrestling (1984), and the world's first hand-to-hand fighting game Karate Champ (1984).

Just Dessert

A vegetarian-friendly 1984 sequel, Peter Pepper's Ice Cream, found our portly cook dishing out creamy dessert instead of burgers. Sadly, the game, released by Data East, lasted as long as a scoop of vanilla in the Sahara.



1982

In headlines:
Tylenol has cyanide headache; John Belushi goes beer belly up

At theaters:
E.T. makes Reese's Pieces America's snack of choice; Mr. T tells Rocky, in no uncertain words, that "I pity the fool!"

On TV:
Capitalism fun with Michael J. Fox on *Family Ties; Cheers* plops its butt on barstool; David Letterman spells late-night laffs

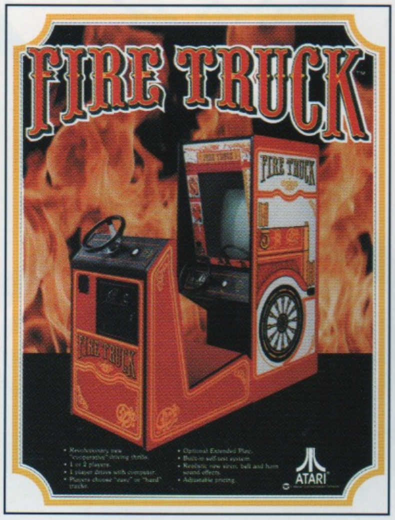
In music:
Michael Jackson chills on *Thriller;* Flock of Seagulls makes hair history

weird video games

The absolute weirdness of BurgerTime made you wonder if the game's programmers had eaten some bad meat. Here are some other classic releases possibly devised after a bout with food poisoning:

Death Race (Exidy, 1976)

Loosely based on the grisly 1975 movie *Death Race 2000,* this Exidy release may have been the first game to stir up parental ire. According to Exidy, the object of the game was to run over zombies and mutants in your deathmobile. But there was a problem: The game's awful graphics made the monsters look too much like actual humans, and running over people with cars wasn't such a crowd-pleasing endeavor.

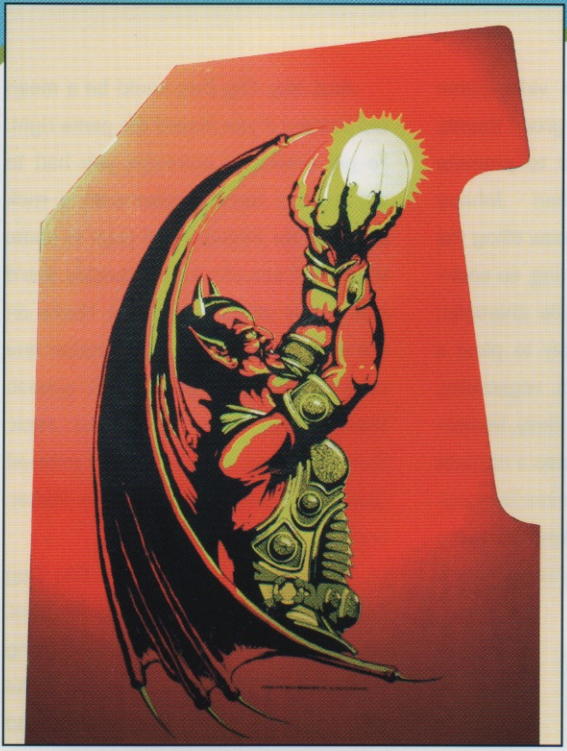


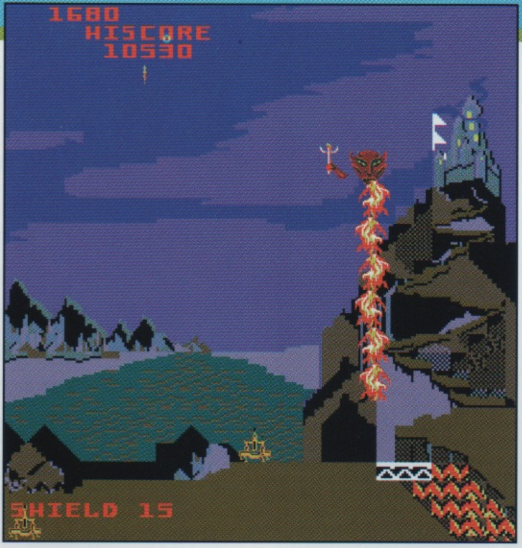
Fire Truck (Atari, 1978)

A two-player game, Fire Truck demanded serious cooperation in order to steer Engine No. 5 to the big blaze. The person sitting down piloted the cab of the truck; player two stood behind trying to keep the independently moving trailer from getting out of line. To add more hysterics to the loopy game, Atari allowed players to ring the "horn" and "bell" buttons, which everyone did with abandon. It was utter chaos.

Food Fight (Atari, 1982)

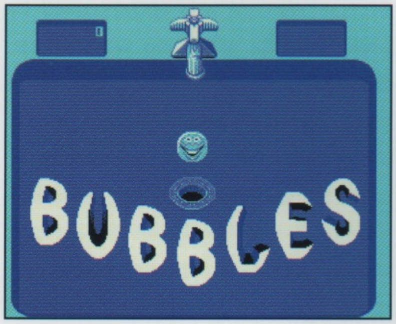
Like Bluto in *Animal House,* you could finally get away with yelling "Food Fight!" at the arcade. As Charley Chuck, a balloon-noggined mischief maker, you heaved piles of watermelon and other splattery foodstuffs at the angry chefs Oscar, Angelo, Jacques and Zorba. If you got hit by their messy projectiles, all the food on the screen piled up on top of Charley, smothering him. The oddest feature of all: the instant replays that periodically interrupted gameplay to show Charley's closest brushes with death.





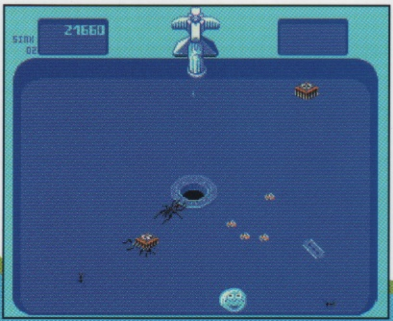
Satan's Hollow (Midway, 1982)

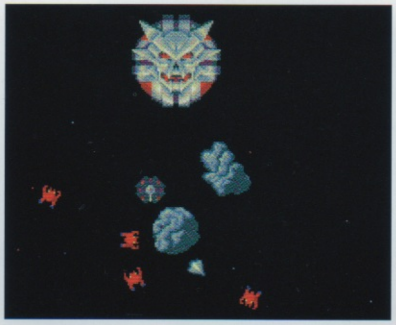
In this devilishly kooky game, you battled Lucifer's gargoyle minions as well as Old Scratch himself—who took in the form of a fire-breathing, disembodied head and a cloven-hooved pitchfork chucker. If you messed up, you luckily only lost a quarter—and not your eternal soul.



Bubbles (Williams, 1983)

You controlled a smiling soap bubble in charge of mopping up a hazardous sink. Enough said.



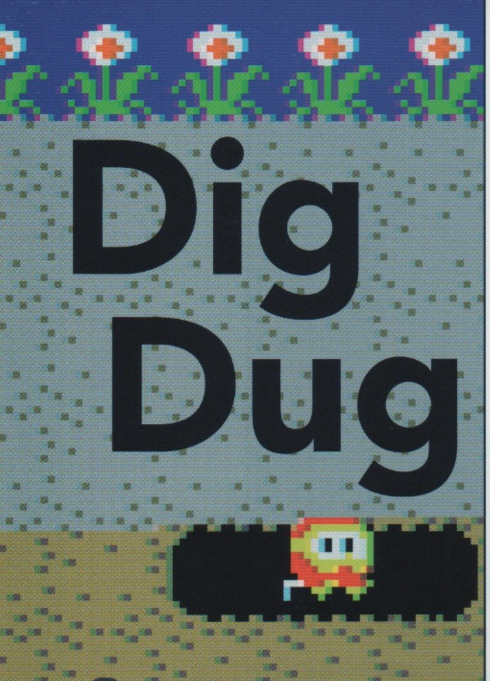


Sinistar (Williams, 1983)

Totally unmasterable, Sinistar was one of the most strangest—and scariest—games ever created. You mined cosmic crystals in order to build Sinibombs, which were the only weapons that could harm the titular presence: a giant, toothy and voracious floating head named Sinistar. When the grimacing boob came to life a few minutes into the game, he'd say "I live!" or "Beware, coward!" or "I hunger!" Soon after, he ate your ship. Burp!

USE SINIBOMBS to
Sinistar
1 CREDIT—50

Dig Dug

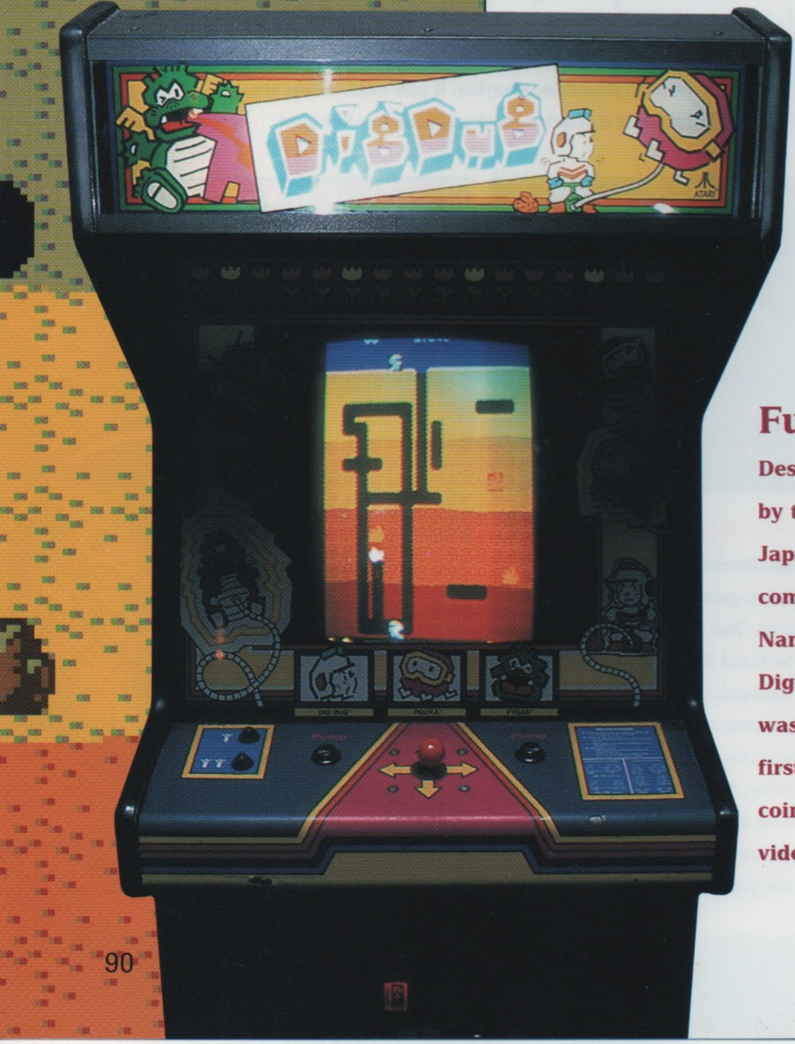


Dig Dug, the first video-game character with a green thumb, probably did more to promote gardening in 1982 than Johnny Appleseed ever did. Who knew tilling the earth could be so entertaining, so cool—and so sadistic? As the title character, your mission was ostensibly to plow a plot of land and find fruits, vegetables, tubers and fungi. It's more likely, however, that your man Dig Dug was a ruthless exterminator of cuddly varmints like goggle-eyed Pookas and flame-throwing Fygars. The free salad was just the booty.

And, boy, Dig Dug could be a mean old bastard if you played the game right. To get maximum pointage, you had to dig a deep tunnel underneath a rock and wait for multiple bad guys to come to papa. If one arrived too quickly, you'd just cruelly tether a poor little Pooka on the end of your pump until another one came along—and then you'd squash them both with the huge rock. Sometimes you messed up and pressed 'pump' one time too many. No matter. Look at the Pooka explode!

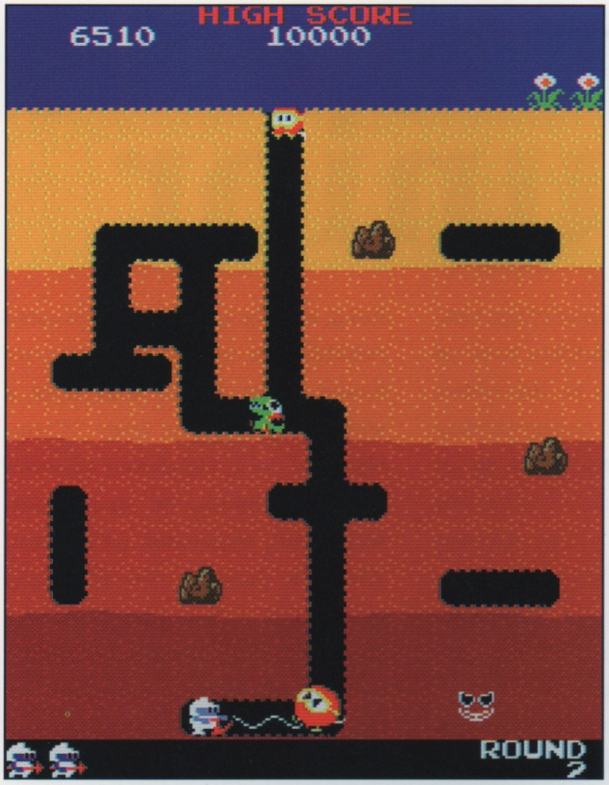
Regardless of how violent Dig Dug got, it was pretty hard not to like him. With his nifty blue and white digging duds and red pump, the little guy broke ground faster than John Henry and racked up more points, to boot. Plus, his every movement was accompanied by perky, 'whistle while you work' music. Eventually, you even took pleasure in crushing and popping the underground-dwelling Pookas and Fygars, who sometimes traveled ghost-like through the earth without the aid of a tunnel, their disembodied eyes and mouths floating ominously through the soil. How dare they interrupt your digging-induced high!

Given its cute characters, Dig Dug was a smash with the preteen set. Those a tad older quickly noticed that, besides being extremely repetitive, the game just wasn't as cool to play as, say, a Pole Position or a Galaga. And that music was almost enough to make you want to take up opera.



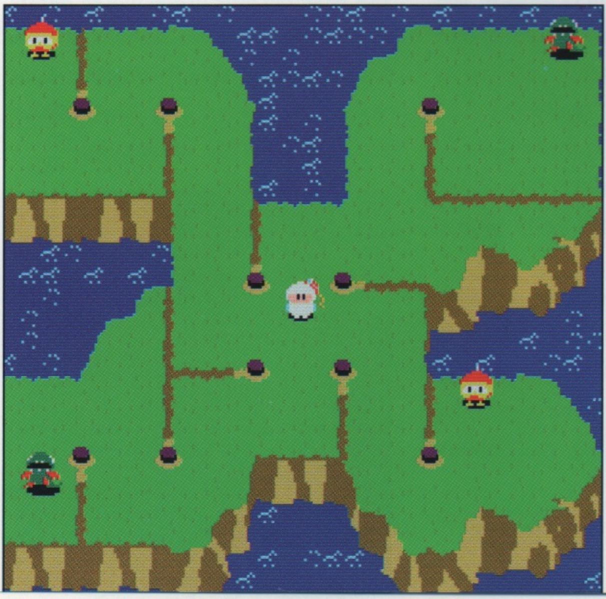
Fun Fact

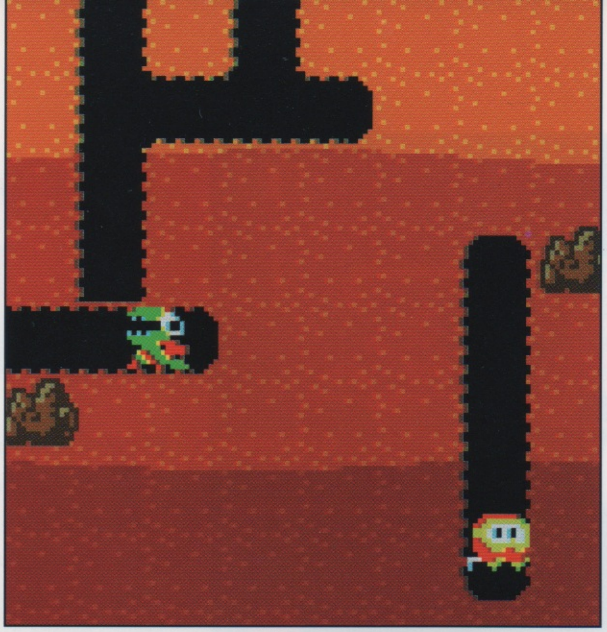
Designed by the Japanese company Namco, Dig Dug was Atari's first imported coin-op video game.



More is Less

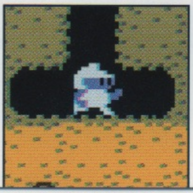
In 1985, Atari unleashed the little-seen Dig Dug II, a confusing 3-D update set above ground. Dug, armed with a jackhammer, dislodged parts of a small island to sink Pookas and Fygars. Too bad this sequel doesn't float.





Pump and Circumstance

Dig Dug was awfully similar to Universal's Mr. Do! (See pages 100-101 for a closer look.) The important difference between the two games is that, in Dig Dug, you didn't have to be a stinkin' clown. Come to think of it, Dig Dug looked a lot like one of those smurfing Smurfs, too. His honorary title might have been Dirty Smurf.



Game: Dig Dug

Year: 1982

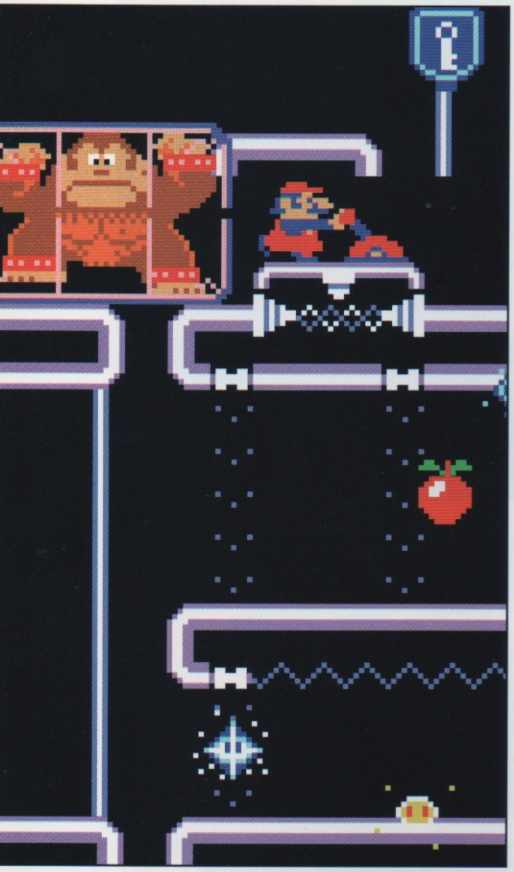
Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Four-direction joystick, "pump" button

Plot: Dig your guts out for nutritional foodstuffs, while dropping boulders on and pumping hot air into cute-but-dangerous subterranean critters

Celluloid Hero

Dig Dug was the first arcade game advertised in national movie theaters. The 142-second commercial, produced by agency Young and Rubicam and enhanced by the team that did the special effects for *Poltergeist,* played like a fake theatrical trailer: Real humans looked down at the ground quizzically as Bugs Bunny-style tunnels rumbled past them. Naaah—what's up, Dug?



Donkey Kong Junior

Talk about your latchkey kids: Junior, the adorable hero of this follow-up to Nintendo's 1981 monkey-lovin' classic Donkey Kong, not only came home to an empty house but faced the daunting prospect of foiling a papa-napping thug. Whodunit? Why, it's none other than your pal Mario, the overalls-wearing barrel hopper you thought you knew so well.

Pulling a *Terminator 2*–style switcheroo on people's loyalties, designer Shigeru Miyamoto cleverly updated his fanciful Nintendo-making hit by making a monkey out of you the second time around. As brave little ape Donkey Kong Junior, your goal was to collect keys in the hope that they'd unlock your dad from his cage. Unfortunately, as in the original, you couldn't win: Mario kept squirreling away Donkey Kong Senior, no matter how close you got. How'd he get to be such a jackass so fast?

As video-game sequels go, Donkey Kong Junior was darn near the top of the heap. That's because the four booby-trapped levels were just as tricky as anything in Donkey Kong, and the game was even more colorful. The sequel was also very funny: When Junior, who wore a white outfit with the letter "J" emblazoned on it, clambered up vines using two hands, he sported this really goofy expression on his face. When he jumped, the plus-sized brat landed with a ground-shaking thud. And when Junior got chomped by one of Mario's minions—like toothy Snapjaws or egg-dropping birds—his eyes would bulge out disgustingly and he'd flail his arms in the throes of death.

Alas, Junior never returned in any of Nintendo's other entries in the Mario universe, leaving one to wonder what became of the diaper dandy. Best guess: Noticing Junior's fascination with keys, Mario employed the young ape as his limo driver. Either that, or he fed the kid to Luigi.

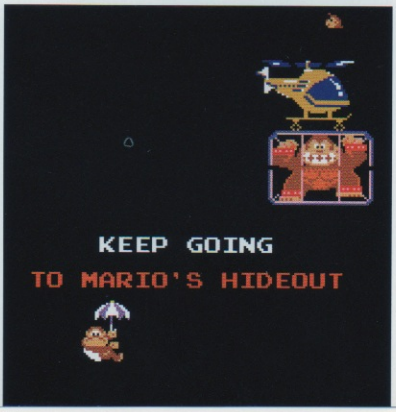
Game: Donkey Kong Junior

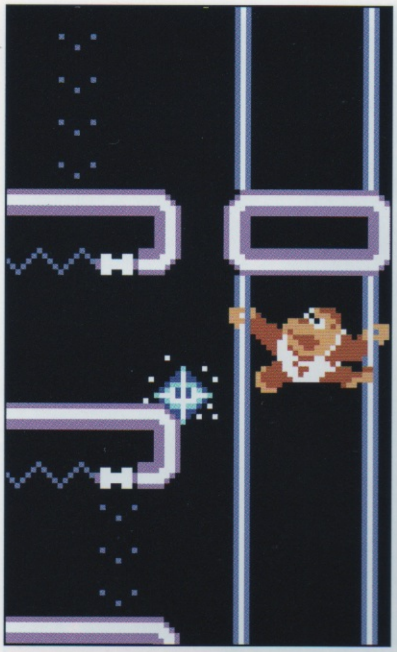
Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Nintendo

Controls: Four-direction joystick, jump button

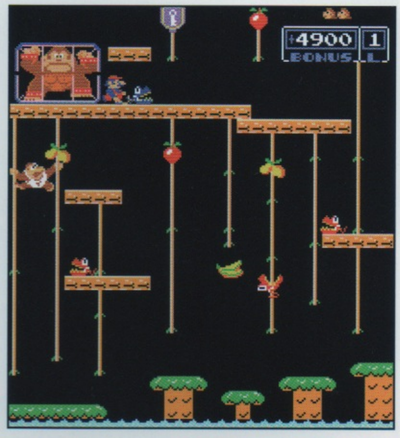
Plot: Climb vines, evade bizarre creatures and generally flummox that cruel bastard Mario in order to free your imprisoned papa, the one and only Donkey Kong

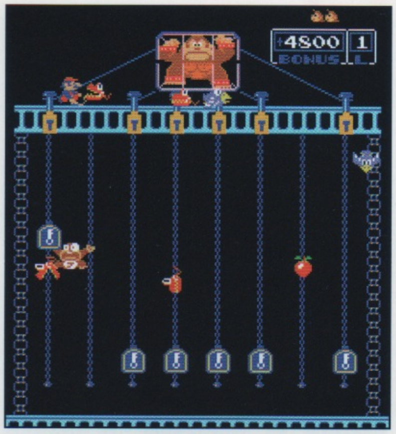


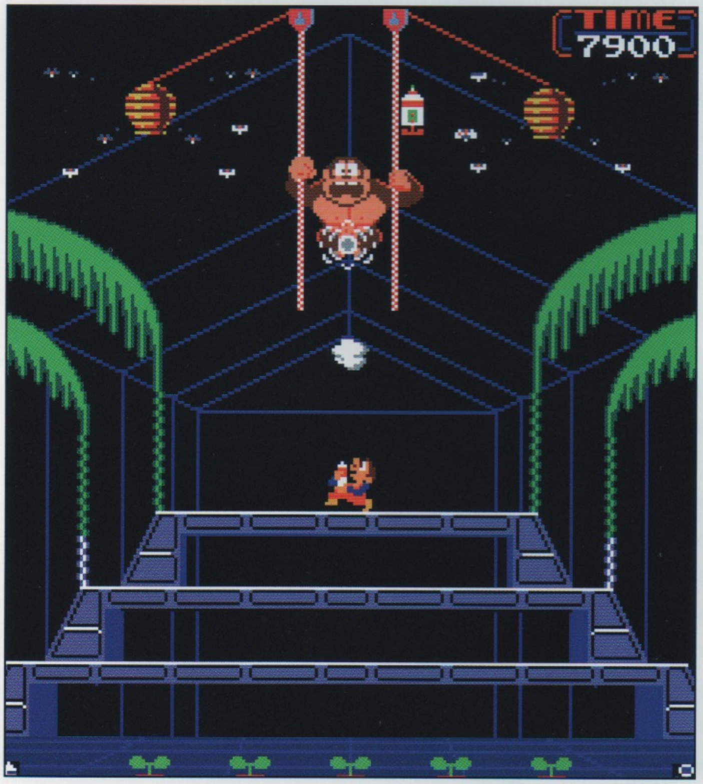


Junior Achievement

Donkey Kong Junior made the difficult transition to the small screen as a segment in CBS's bodacious 1983–85 cartoon showcase *Saturday Supercade.* The program suffered from looking nothing like Shigeru Miyamoto's richly designed game, and the producers added a stupid human character named Bones to join Junior on his search for his papa. Still, anything beat watching *The Littles.*

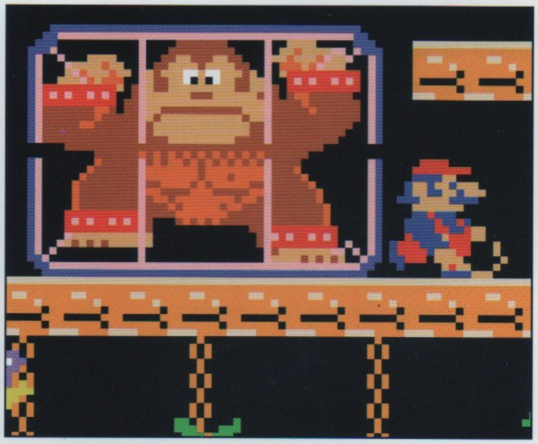






Third Strike

In 1983, Nintendo went back to the well with the Galaga-inflected Donkey Kong 3. What the heck happened? Mario is nowhere to be found, Donkey Kong is back to his villainous ways, and some pale gardener named Stanley is running around spraying enemy critters with insect repellent. It was as much fun as a can of Raid. Luckily, Nintendo also put out the insanely original Mario Bros. (see pages 128–129) in 1983, ensuring the future of the bulbous-nosed, overalls-wearing species.

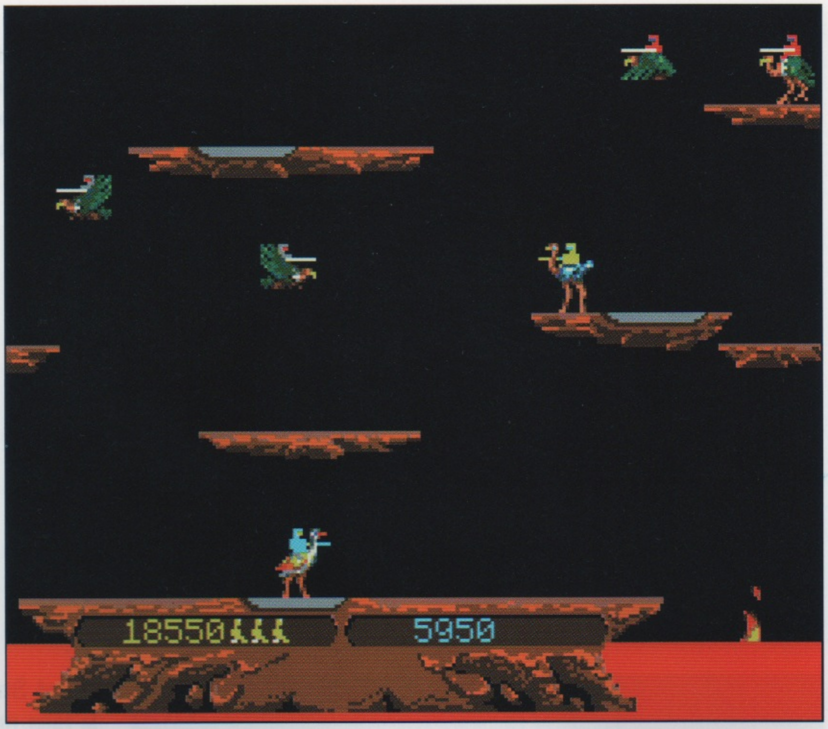


Joust

Oh, to have been a fly on the wall when fledgling game designer John Newcomer pitched Williams Electronics his very first idea. "So I want to do this new type of game, right?" (Uh-huh.) "It's like a jousting tournament, okay?" (Okay. . .) "Except that the opponents can fly?" (Hmm. . .) "And there's a 'flap' button instead of 'fire'?" (Uh. . .) "Did I mention that players get to ride an ostrich?" (Wait—did you say ostrich? This just might work!) Surprisingly, Williams let Newcomer try out his oddball concept, and in 1982's Joust, ostrich-mounted jockeys took to the skies in almost troubling numbers.

Part of the game's instant appeal lay in its gimmicky means of transport: You had to repeatedly smack the "flap" button to get your bird airborne, and a quarter was an awfully small price to pay for the permission to smack something repeatedly. You and a fellow ostrich rider would certainly last longer by calling a truce and teaming up to dismount the red-, silver- and blue-armored bad guys that smugly toured the arena atop ugly green buzzards. More often than not, though, you'd wage serious grudge matches against each other, exchanging major pointage for the raw pleasure of kicking your friend's ass.

Also, Joust reveled in its strangeness. It used quaint anachronisms like "Thy game is over" and "Enter thy name, my lord" while also sloughing you off as "buzzard bait." With no music to speak of, Joust's most memorable noises were the mesmerizing *flap-flap-flap* of your ostrich, the annoying screech whenever you stopped on a platform and the blood-curdling squawk of the nearly invincible pterodactyl (which appeared when you dawdled on a particular wave). If you flew too low, the phantom hand of the Lava Troll snatched your ostrich's legs, sucking you down into the ooze. All this, plus the game never made mention of the fact that *ostriches can't fly.*



Beats Stove-Top Stuffing

Newcomer, a former toy designer, sent his resume to Williams crammed down the maw of a rubber chicken. That guy's really got a thing for birds.

Game: Joust

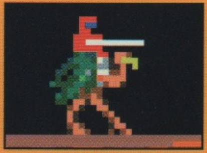
Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Williams Electronics

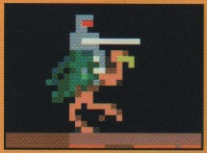
Controls: Two-direction joystick, "flap" button

Plot: Ride tall in the saddle of a flying ostrich to outlance vulture-borne enemies hell-bent on dismounting you

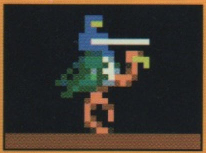
Meet Thy Enemies:



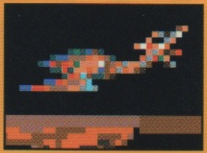
Bounder



Hunter



Shadow Lord



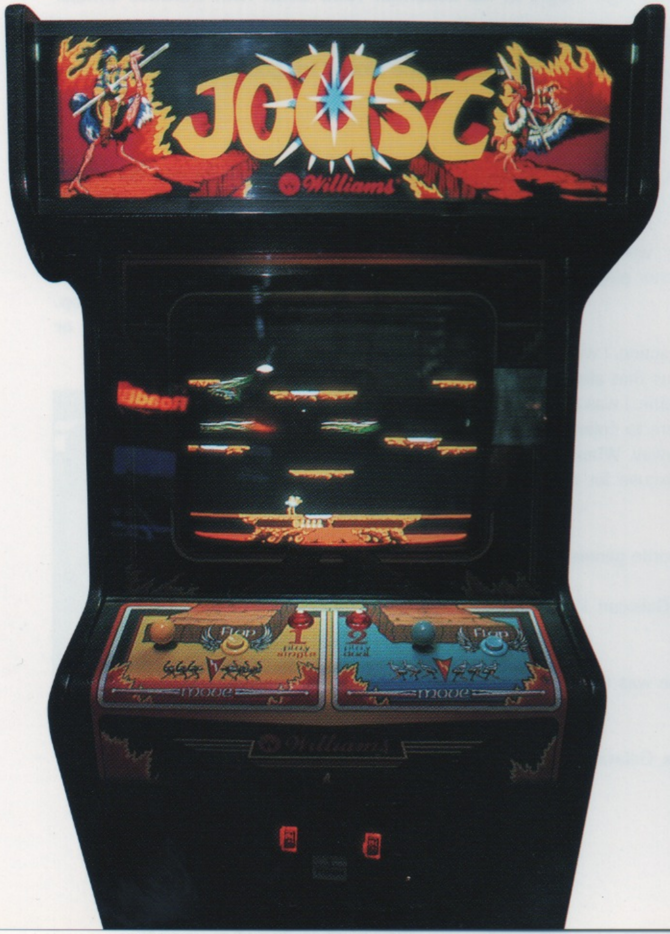
the 'unbeatable?' pterodactyl

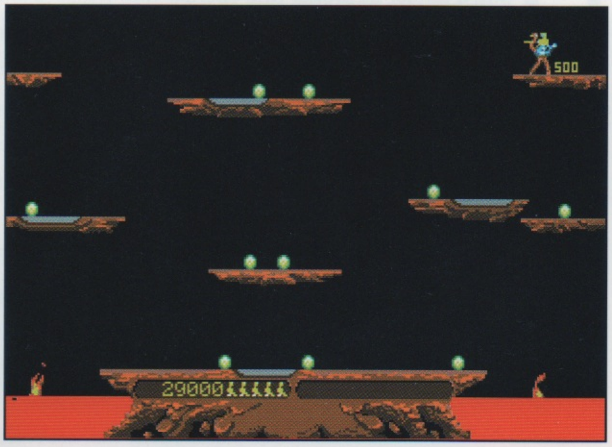
Cocktail Party

The cozy cocktail model of Joust allowed two people to sit on the same side of the table and flap away to their hearts content. What a great wedding gift!

Ye Marketing Ploy

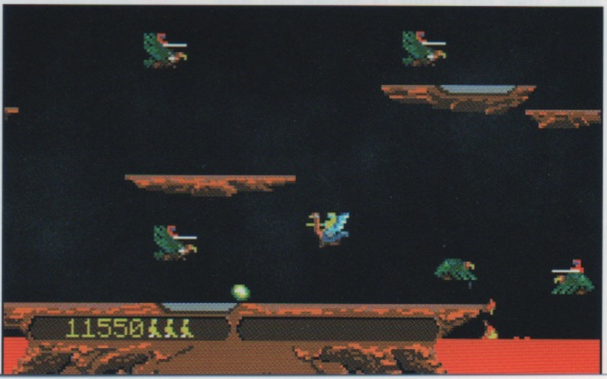
A publicity flyer sent out by Williams to announce Joust to coin-op distributors read: "His Majesty King Williams will receive his many subjects at his magnificent Joust tournament in ye Land of Molten Magma and Stoned Clouds. Whereat all able and brave Knights shalt ride their Bird and shalt fight with lance ye evil enemies." Perhaps it's a good thing that Williams didn't mail this to prospective players.





Ptero Firma

On certain waves, you could exploit a glitch in the game by situating your lance perfectly on the lowest floating platform to repeatedly pick off the allegedly unbeatable pterodactyl at 1000 points a pop. The fortuitous event helped Joust masters "earn" enough free dudes to bolt to the toilet and still have hundreds of ostriches to burn.



The Referee

Racking up points with Walter Day, the chief referee at Iowa's all-important Twin Galaxies Intergalactic Scoreboard

Of all the video-game joints in all the cities in all the world, you had to walk into his. The arcade honcho in question: Walter Day, a former oil broker who opened Twin Galaxies in the unassuming town of Ottumwa, Iowa, on November 10, 1981, and quickly turned it into the most prestigious arcade in the country. Within 15 months, the establishment had garnered praise in *Life* magazine and had sponsored a high-score tournament for the television sensation *That's Incredible!* after launching its most important feature, a scoreboard that allowed players to establish worldwide bragging rights by reporting their highest point totals on their favorite games. The best players in the universe flocked to Day's side, and, in the summer of 1983, the elite among these paraded around the country as the United States National Video Game Team. How cool was Twin Galaxies?

Day, now 51, captured much of the Golden Age magic in his essential 1998 book *Twin Galaxies Official Video Game and Pinball Book of World Records,* and has breathed new life into his scorekeeping endeavor by launching a website at twingalaxies.com. Although his once-proud arcade closed for good back in 1990, Day revisited the Twin Galaxies experience with us anyway.

Arcade Fever: Twin Galaxies claims to be the world's official video-game scoreboard. Has that ever been contested by anyone?

Walter Day: No one's ever said, "You're not the scoreboard!" That's never happened. No one in the world does this stuff. We have a unique position of being the official creators of the rules, the enforcers of the rules and the crowners of video-game royalty.

AF: Do you think the greatest players have anything in common?

WD: I've noticed some interesting personality traits. They don't drink or smoke and they don't take drugs. They have amazingly clear minds and creative processes. It turns out that if they were to drink or smoke or take drugs, they would have their faculties blunted and they would not be the champions. It's almost like the way a car burns oil.

AF: What do they eat for breakfast?

WD: They eat Wheaties, the breakfast of the video-game champions.

AF: As an arcade owner, were you pissed off when a video-game master played all day on a single quarter?

WD: I never had that reaction. I was fascinated by the skill and focus that allowed these people to dominate a game. I was totally supportive. I was never there to collect quarters from the machines anyway. When I opened the arcade it was an excuse for me to play video games all day.

AF: What were your favorite games?

WD: I liked Gorf. I liked Galaxian. I liked Make Trax.

AF: I noticed your name was in your book a few times for scores.

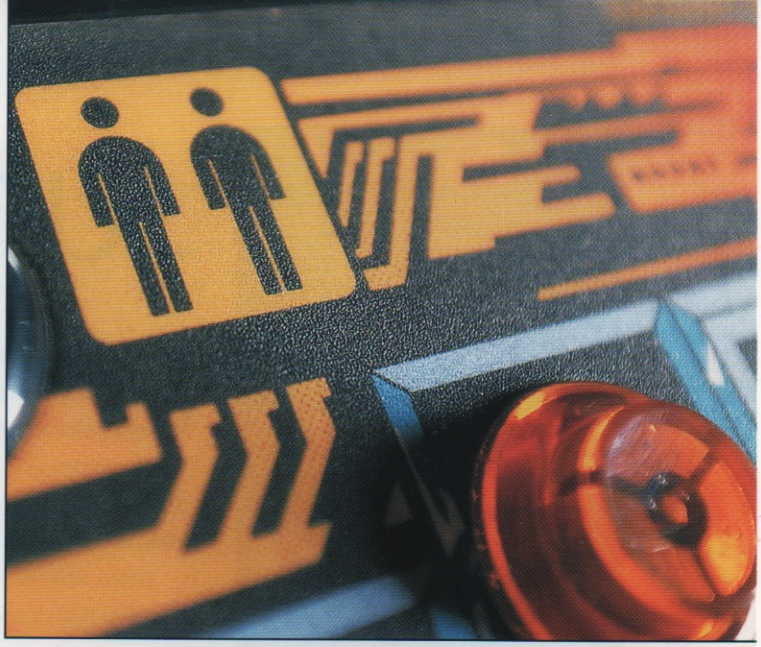
WD: Yep. For Make Trax, Galaxian and Gorf.

AF: Don't you think it's odd that the official record keeper has some of the top scores on these games?

WD: I understand what you're saying. It's sort of like the wolf guarding the chicken coop. But I'm not the top score, just like third or fourth on them.

Four champs

Posse cats: Day, in suit, stands with the motley video-game elite.



AF: What happens to people who cheat when they report their scores?

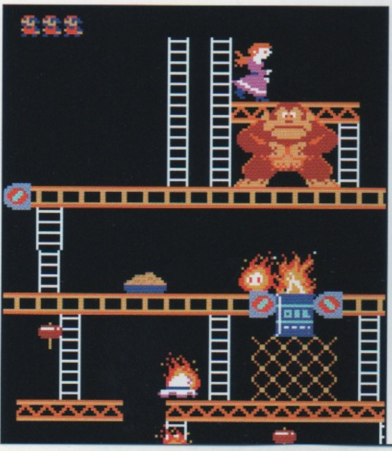
WD: They're kicked off the scoreboard. The most audacious was the guy who claimed 3.1 million on Donkey Kong and later confessed that he really couldn't do it. People became so obsessed and thought they wouldn't be loved if they weren't the champs.

AF: What do you consider the toughest video-game scores to beat?

WD: Probably the stuff on Ms. Pac-Man and the stuff on Donkey Kong. Those are like one-of-kind scores.

AF: How strange is it that Ottumwa, Iowa, became this video game mecca?

WD: It was an unusual set of circumstances where the newspaper got in support of it, the TV station got in support of it, the mayor got in support of it and the people loved it to death. The mayor actually went out and proclaimed Ottumwa the "Video Game Capital of the World."



AF: How cocky was it to make that claim?

WD: Completely cocky. What was so amazing was that everybody went along with it and responded in such a positive sort of way that the media everywhere turned it into a major story, and that story went all over the world.

AF: How great was it for Twin Galaxies to be featured on *That's Incredible!?*

WD: It was a wonderful experience for me and the players. It put Twin Galaxies and Ottumwa on the map even more, and it turned Twin Galaxies into a tourist attraction. This became the arcade in the whole world to come and show your stuff or come and watch the great players play. So it became the crossroads of the video-game world. It was the Dodge City where all the fastest guns would come.

AF: And you were Marshall Dillon?

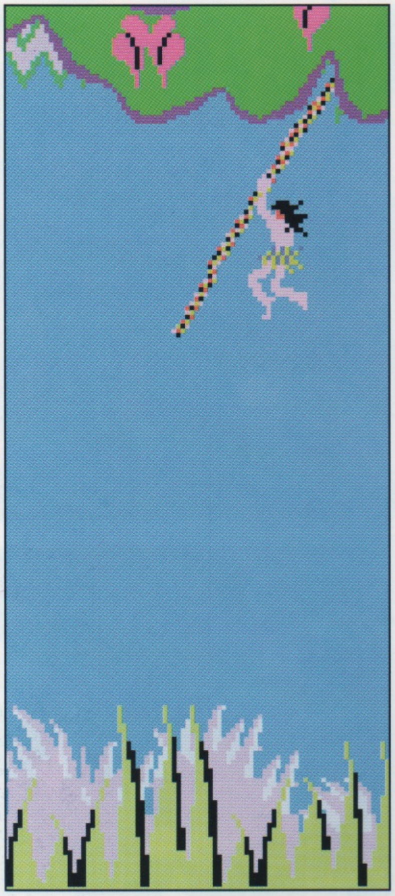
WD: And I was Marshall Dillon.

AF: If you built it now, do you think they would come?

WD: Rebuild Twin Galaxies in Ottumwa, you mean? Well, the arcade's been turned into an opthometrist's shop.

Glad hand: Day crowns Phill Britt in 1985.

Glory day: Twin Galaxies back in 1983.



Game: Jungle King

Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Taito

Controls: Eight-direction joystick; jump/knife button

Plot: Guide your Tarzan-like hero over hazardous terrain to rescue a beautiful blond from spear-wielding cannibals

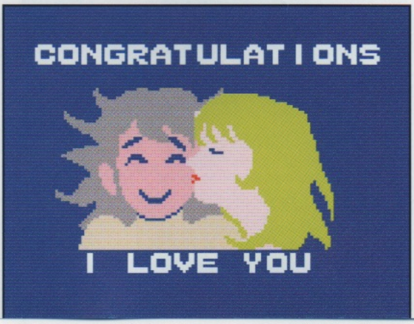
Jungle King

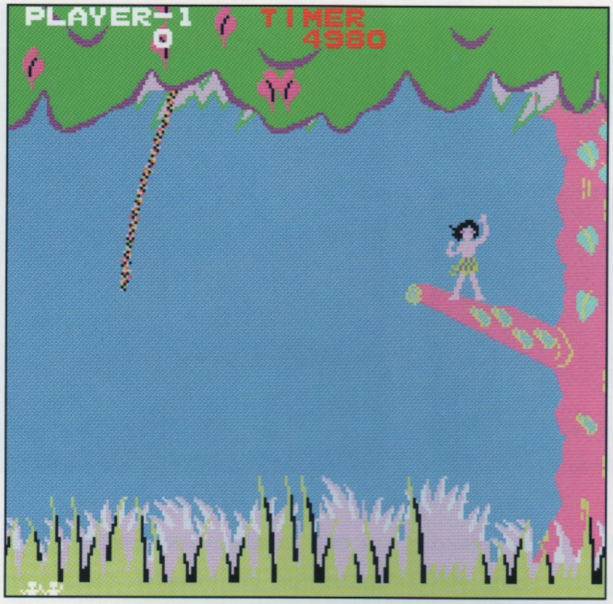
For a dude that wore a leopard-print skirt, Jungle King sure was cool. In fact, the Taito hero—who braved crocodiles, boulders, territorial monkeys and cannibals on his quest to save his hot girlfriend—quickly became the swingingest cat in the Congo upon the eponymous game's release in 1982. What a pity, then, that he died such a meaningless death before the year was out.

From the moment you heard Jungle King's Tarzan-like roar, you knew this guy had coconut-sized cojones. (You could almost see them, too; his loin cloth was appallingly short.) Plus, it said so right there, next to the nearly naked "Jane" babe depicted on the marquee: This clearly wasn't some low-level Jungle Earl or Duke pretending to be something he wasn't. He was the Jungle King, plain and simple, and you were more than happy to help him in his royal endeavor.

But, like the jungle-lovin' home game Pitfall! before it, this Taito adventure was no simple walk in the woods. You had to conquer four difficult levels: First, you awkwardly swung from vine to vine, working around the occasional angry simian; second, you dove into a river, desperately knifing open-jawed crocodiles while holding your breath; third, you jumped and ducked oncoming boulders; and, finally, you leaped over the spears of ugly cannibals to save your blond girlfriend, who is suspended sexily over a boiling cauldron. If you performed adequately, the fair maiden would peck you on the cheek and say "I LOVE YOU!" Jungle King would then blush, proving that even a guy wearing dental floss about his privates can have complicated emotions.

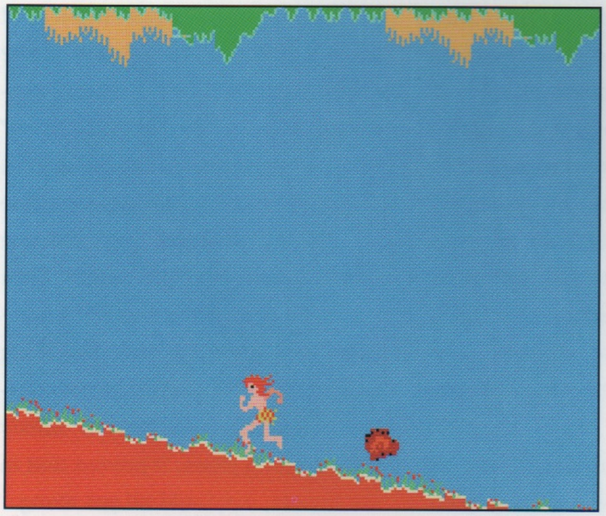
Alas, Jungle King was forced to abdicate his throne due to legal wrangling in the real world. Immediately after the game's release in the U.S., the estate of author Edgar Rice Burroughs, which owned the rights to the Tarzan image, threatened to sue Taito over obvious similarities (e.g. the Tarzan cry). Soon, Taito changed our favorite jungle savage into a nerdy explorer in a pith helmet, took out the questionable sound effect and renamed the game Jungle Hunt. Savvy players said, "Me, Tarzan. You, lame!" and the game quickly disappeared.

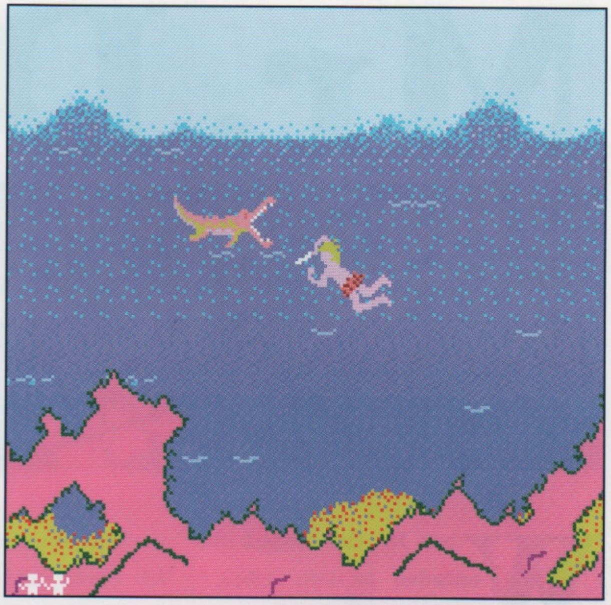


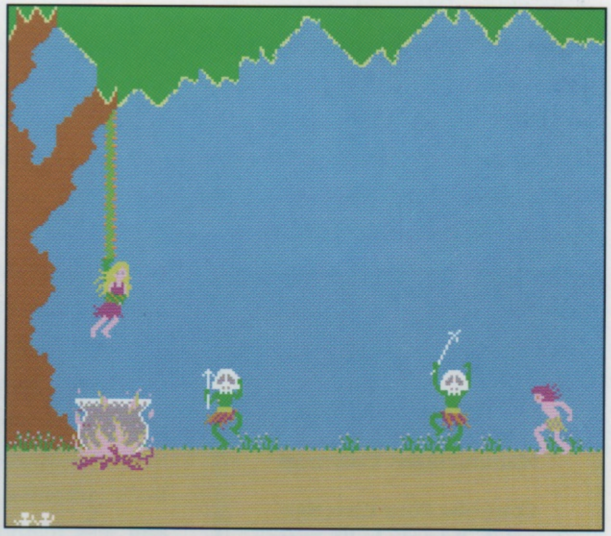


Color Man

Jungle King went through more changes in hair color than Dennis Rodman. On each of the first four boards he received a bold new dye job: He started off as a brunet, then went blond for the water scene, switched to a fiery red on the slopes and finished with a punked-out purple look. When the levels started over again, he was sporting a different shade of brown. Yo, J.K., cool it with the Grecian Formula!



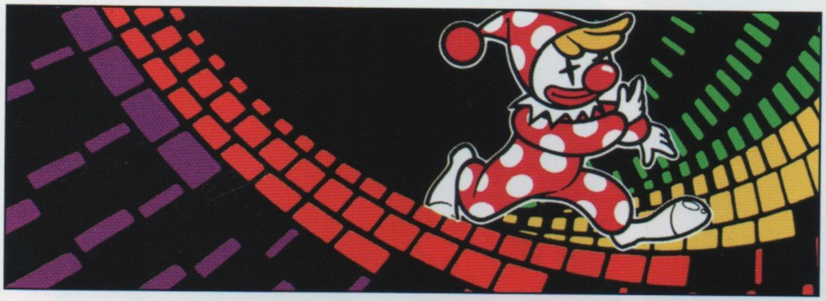


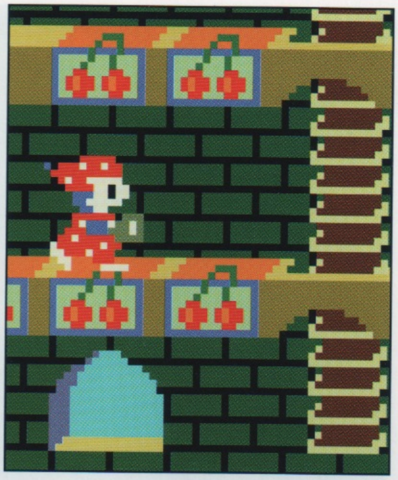


Pirate Episode

Taito also published a lawsuit-free version of the game entitled Pirate Pete. It was similar to Jungle King in nearly every respect, except Pete accessorized with a funky bandanna, an eye-patch and a scimitar; he swung on ropes aboard a ship and killed sharks in the water; plus, his woman was not as hot as Jungle King's. And whither the parrot?

Mr. Do!





When Mr. Do! landed in arcades in late 1982, seasoned gamers looked at the chirpy Universal release with skepticism. Who the heck did this clown think he was? This Mr. Do! cat couldn't barge into your arcade in his poncy red joker's outfit and try to steal Dig Dug's thunder! Shouldn't he be called Mr. Don't!?

Game: Mr. Do!

Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Universal

Controls: Four-direction joystick, "magic ball" button

Plot: As the determined clown Mr. Do!, munch cherries while picking off monsters with your magic powerball

This sour-faced reaction lasted for about two minutes until you actually threw a token into the game. Almost immediately, you warmed to the friendly clown, even if he did seem like a bastardization of your new Atari buddy Dig Dug (see pages 90–91). In each game, a cutely animated character tilled the earth while bizarre monsters gave chase; furthermore, both protagonists could waste the bad guys with a projectile (a ball here instead of Dig Dug's pump hose) or drop a heavy object on top of them (apples instead of rocks). The downside: Mr. Do!'s graphics were more mushy and less memorable than its Atari counterpart, and you had to put on a clown suit instead of Dig Dug's futuristic gardening threads. The upside: You never had to wait very long to play it.

And Mr. Do! was not devoid of its own pleasurable nuances, such as that excellent exclamation point in the title. For instance, the powerball was a demanding weapon, skipping through tunnels as if it had a mind of its own and sometimes shooting off along a particular fork you hadn't intended it to take. Plus, as you gobbled up those subterranean cherries, which were conveniently clustered in groups of eight, the machine loudly chimed out the "do-re-mi" scale. (Which, of course, brought up another sticky issue: Was Mr. Do!'s surname pronounced as in "do the right thing" or as in "do, a deer, a female deer"?)

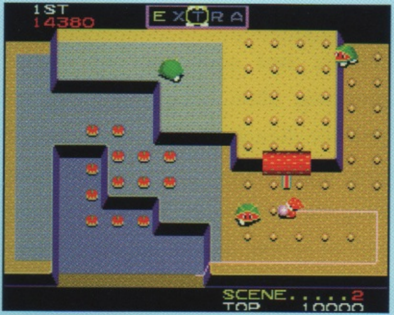
In the end, you didn't begrudge Mr. Do! for invading your favorite hangout one bit. You could even use it to your advantage: If someone was hogging the Dig Dug machine, you now had another perfectly legitimate option to satisfy your digging jones. It proved that in the arcade, we could all get along.

The Many Faces of Mr. Do!

Despite the fact that Mr. Do! is one of *Arcade Fever's* more obscure classics, Universal churned out nearly as many sequels to the game as there were *Police Academy* flicks. Here's a quick rundown:

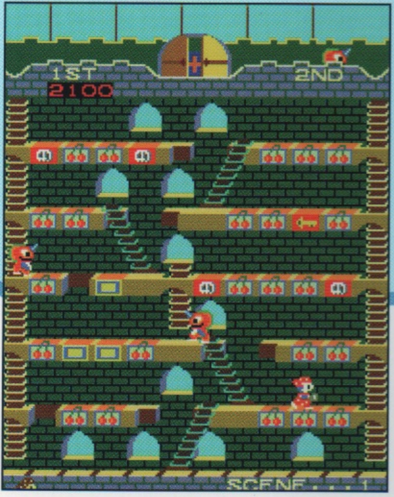
Mr. Do!'s Castle (1983)

A less cerebral challenge than the original, Mr. Do!'s Castle found our red-suited hero climbing the ladders of his mysterious stronghold and knocking out bricks with a magic hammer in order to reach the next level. How he could afford a castle on a clown's salary was not explained.



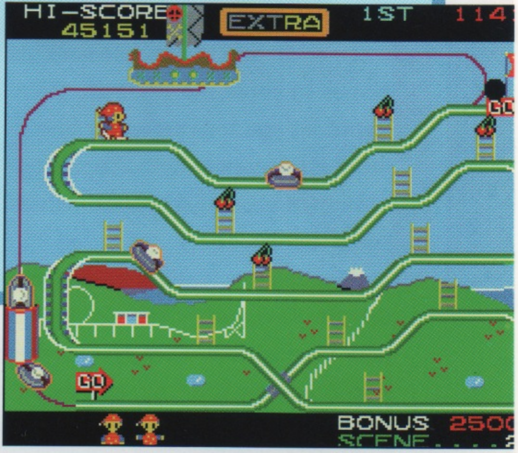
Mr. Do! Run Run (1984)

For this third sequel, Universal took a cue from the 1983 Atari classic Crystal Castles by having the slap-happy protagonist run around a series of three-dimensional, multitiered boards gobbling up dots. The title further confused the pronunciation of Mr. Do!'s name.



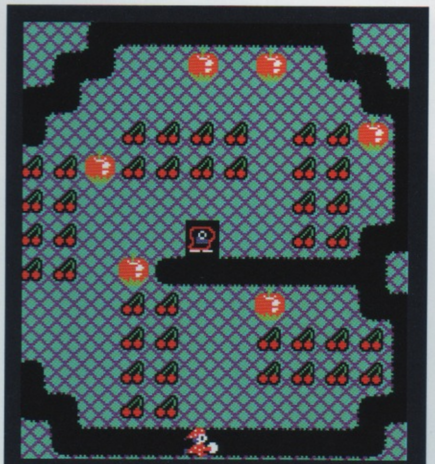
Mr. Do!'s Wild Ride (1984)

Universal beat a dead horse for Wild Ride, which took place on various roller coasters our favorite clown was stupidly attempting to climb. It was arguably the best of the bunch.



Universal Syndicate

Besides the Mr. Do! series, Universal had relatively few hit releases. Its most notable non-clown success the briefly acceptable Lady Bug, a girly 1981 Pac-Man style maze game.



Numbers Game

At the start of every level, the pre-existing tunnels formed a number (3 in this image) that corresponded to your current level—except the first scene, which read "DO." Just DO It!

Moon Patrol

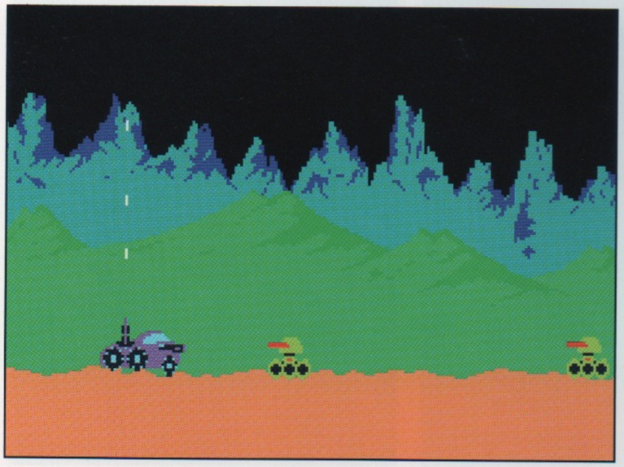
one small step for a man and one giant leap for mankind...

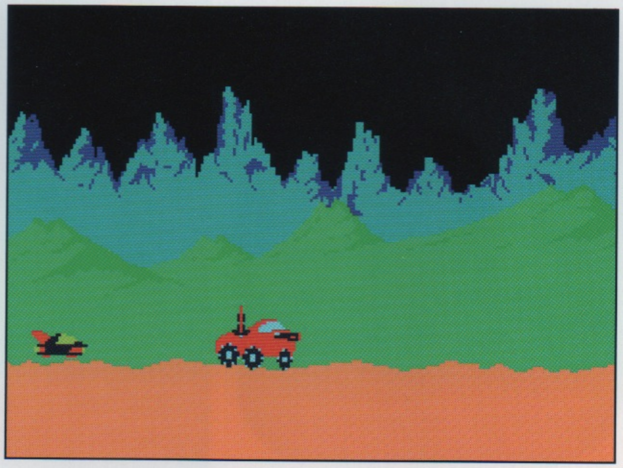
In 1969, Neal Armstrong took one small step for a man and one giant leap for mankind. Thirteen years later, Moon Patrol landed in arcades and carried the human race even farther into the space age. This time, though, it only cost us a quarter.

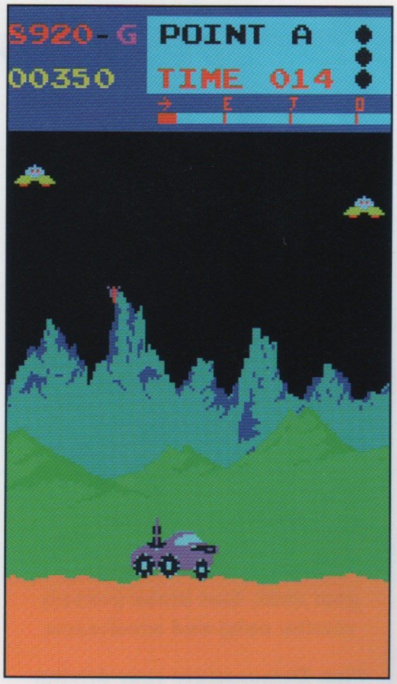
One of the more pleasurable games to come out in 1982, Moon Patrol let you tool around a hostile lunar environment in the comfort of a souped-up moon buggy, which could bunny hop at your bidding and fire missles to the front and into the air. The purple vehicle (red in later rounds) sped from checkpoints A to Z, happily bouncing past mountains and strange alien structures on its titular "patrol" mission. Rocks, craters, and squadrons of bomb-dropping alien spacecraft were on you like flies on a rump roast, and if you fired when you should have jumped, the buggy would explode and its wheels would bound all over the place.

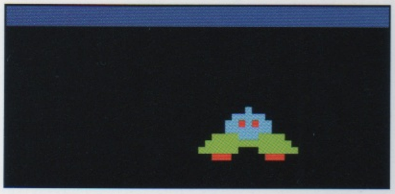
As the game progressed from the dexterity-challenging "Beginner Course Go!" to the callus-inducing "Champion Course Go!" your tiny buggy became a bigger target than Sally Struthers. The skies came alive with tricky triangular blue ships that unleashed flashing widow-makers, which created huge divots on the moon's surface and required nimble speed control on the joystick and simultaneous use of the jump and fire buttons. Your earthbound task grew increasingly complex, too, with the addition of land mines, yellow tanks, rolling boulders and icky flora that flinched unpredicably when you jumped over it. There was even a bitchin' black, red and yellow rocket car that snuck up behind you and tried to run right up your tailpipe.

All this mind-snaring action, plus Moon Patrol was kickin' it with a tasty groove—there was, is and never will be a more funky bassline in a video game. We may never know the name of the driver behind the wheel of that purple moon buggy, but he sure did know how to jam.









Game: Moon Patrol

Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Williams Electronics

Controls: Two-direction joystick, fire button, jump button

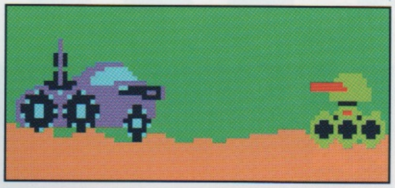
Plot: Cruise around the pockmarked surface of a deep-space moon, shooting rabid alien spacecraft and other enemy vessels

I Think, Therefore Irem

Moon Patrol, nicely designed by the Japanese company Irem, was the only foreign title manufactured by Williams Electronics, the people that gave you Defender and Joust.

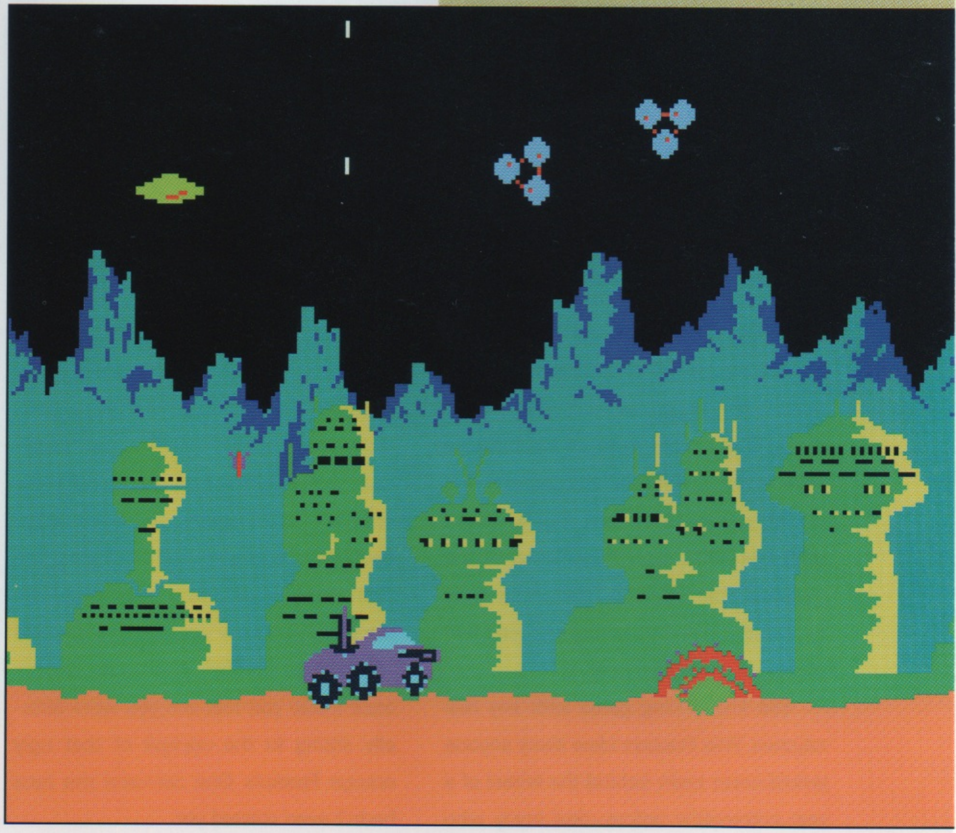
Fun Fact

Moon Patrol was the first game with parallax scrolling, the hep technology in which the foreground and background move at different speeds in order to simulate forward motion.

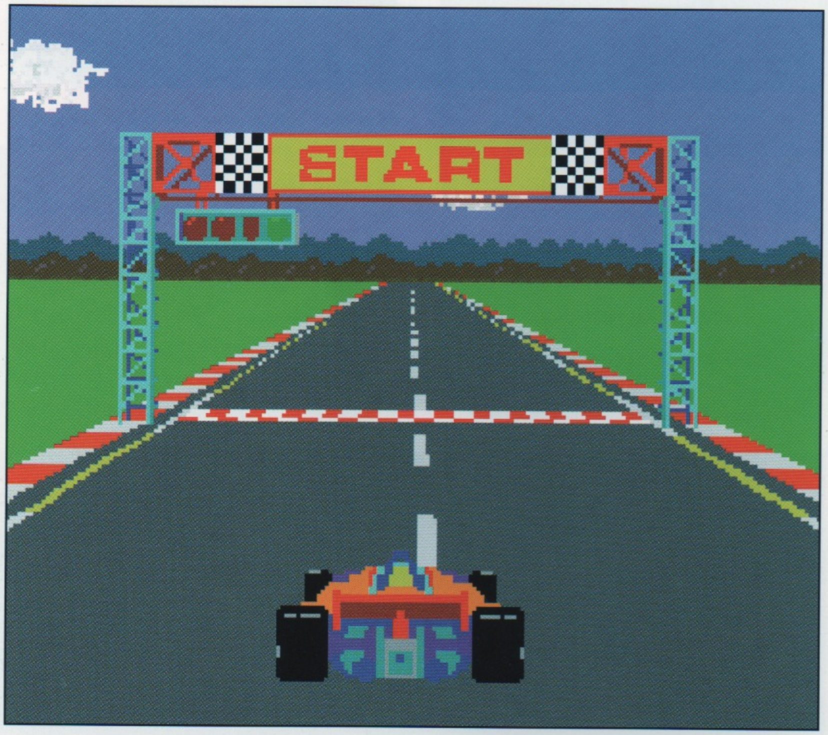


Coin Quest

Moon Patrol sported an uncommon feature that allowed you to insert another quarter to continue your game from the same checkpoint that you died. This now-ubiquitous money-making scheme has its roots in the obscure Rock-Ola ad-venture Fantasy (1981).



POLE POSITION



Checkered Flag

You had to complete the qualifying round in 73 seconds or less to move on to the big Gran Prix. Nothing sucked more than running out of time with the finish line in sight!

Game: Pole Position

Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Steering wheel, gear shift, foot brake (cockpit version only) and accelerator

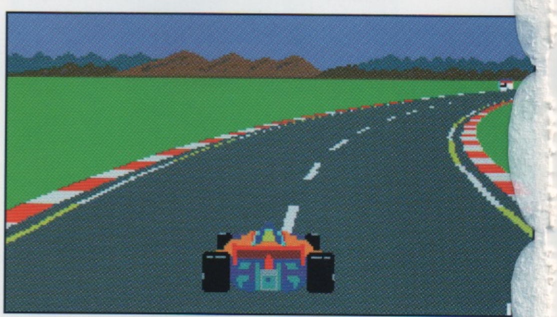
Plot: Demonstrate your driving prowess by steering your Formula I racecar around the nasty Fuji Speedway track

Major milestone: First wildly successful driving game

Call it the Green Machine Effect: A kid behind the wheel of pretty much anything is one happy camper. Atari picked up on this simple truth as far back as 1974 when it released the world's first driving game, Gran Trak. But it wasn't until late 1982, with the release of the megahit Pole Position, that Atari truly captured the hearts, minds and lead feet of arcade brats everywhere.

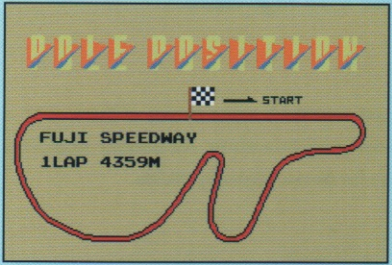
The first driving game with any real cajones, Pole Position blew away anyone who'd never been behind the wheel of a real automobile before—and many who had. The course was designed on Japan's bona fide 4.359-kilometer Fuji International Speedway, but the authenticity only began there. The verasimilitude was tangible from the get-go: the rumble of the engines, the beep-beep-beep-BOOP! of the starter's lights, the Atari blimp soaring over distant Mt. Fuji, the incredibly sexy way the woman said "Prepare to qualify." The entire experience made you feel like you were actually sitting in the cockpit of that ugly orange Formula One car—and the race hadn't even started yet.

As you shifted into high gear and kicked it up towards 200 mph by the big first turn, you knew this was as close you were ever going to get to the real thing (uh, this was 1982). It took bold steering skills indeed to avoid those rival cars with their ridiculous strong-arm tactics—one false move and your car would



Product Placement

The billboards along the sides of the race track featured shout-outs to Namco Amusement Creators, Atari, and its games Dig-Dug (with a cute image of a Pooka) and Centipede. There was also a "what the. . . ?" advertisement for a game called Pole Position.



Fun Fact

The Fuji International Speedway has been hosting Grand Prix events since it opened outside Tokyo in 1966.

ATARI
POLE POSITION

Car 'Toon

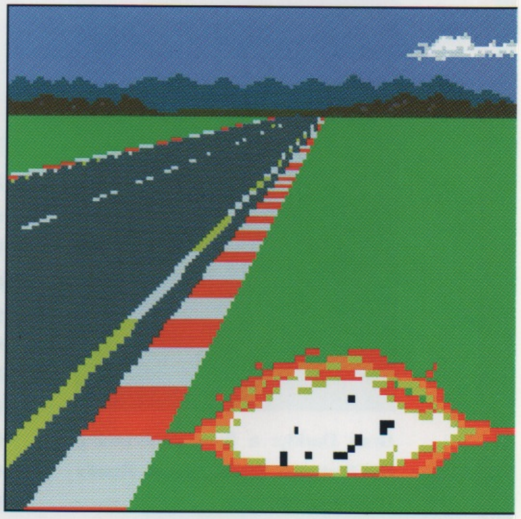
The sad-sack animated *Pole Position* ran for 13 episodes on CBS from 1984 to '86. The plot focused on three orphans who took over their family's traveling stunt show and, with the help of two talking cars named Roadie and Wheels, also solved mysteries. Along for the ride was their strange and wondrous pet Kuma, an annoying Snarf-like hybrid that was part cat and part monkey!

explode, wheels flying all over heck. And that bad-ass hairpin turn was just too much: You were going to run into that damn Centipede billboard and there was nothing you could do about it.

Acned drivers took to Pole Position like teenage girls to Ricky Schroder. It was far and away the most successful title of 1983, outpacing Star Wars, Dragon's Lair and Mario Bros., and it moved more Atari 2600 cartridges than Yars' Revenge. Unbelievably, Atari almost missed out on the Pole Position magic, because Japanese designer Namco first presented the game to rival Midway. But Midway elected to license the mouse-cop game Mappy, instead. Good thing, too, because it just wouldn't have been the same thing with a Midway blimp.

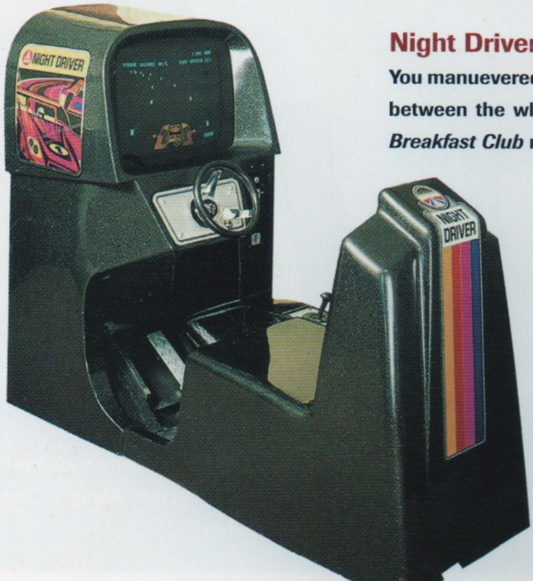
Pole to Pole

In late 1983, Pole Position II upped the ante with four real racetracks (including Fuji Speedway) and refined graphics. For the track-side billboards, Atari solicited ads from companies outside the video-game industry, such as 7-Eleven and A&W Root Beer.



race riots

Nowhere has the march of video-game technology been more easy to discern than in the driving-game genre. Once the place for rudimentary black-and-white blips (see Sprint 2), the category quickly zoomed up to the seeming absolute realism of Pole Position and well beyond (e.g. modern-day simulators San Francisco Rush and Cruis'n Exotica). *Arcade Fever* checks its rear-view mirrors and sees these three road-rage classics:

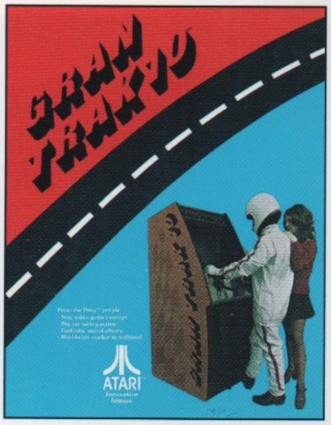


Night Driver (Atari, 1976)

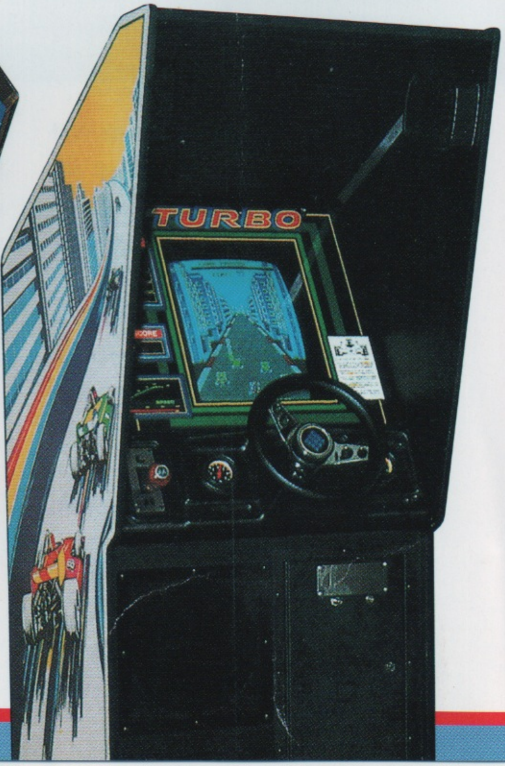
You manuevered a roadster—really just a sticker placed over the bottom center of the screen—between the white pylons that defined a long-and-winding interstate. As Bender from *The Breakfast Club* might tell you, put on your sunglasses for better highway vision.

Monaco GP (Sega/Gremlin, 1980)

The first driving game with full color, Monaco GP vividly propelled the genre to new heights. Your score (measured on a cool LED display) increased the more road you ate up, but to master the game you had to weave through heavy traffic while kicking it at full speed. The coolest feature: At times, your red car would go through a tunnel and its feeble headlights would only partially cover the terrain in front of you. Danger!



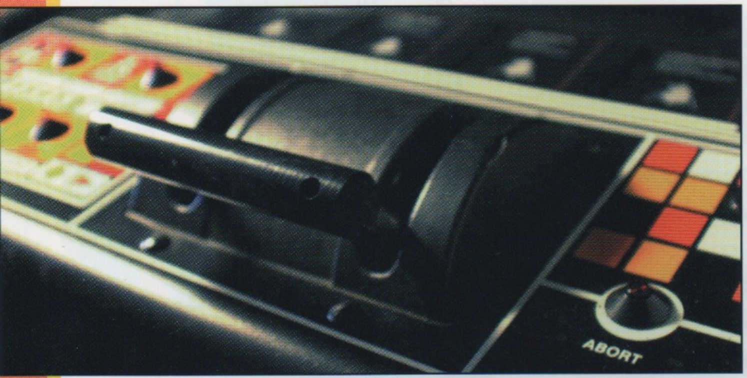
Gran Daddy: a flyer announcing the first ever driving game, Atari's Gran Trak 10.



Turbo (Sega, 1981)

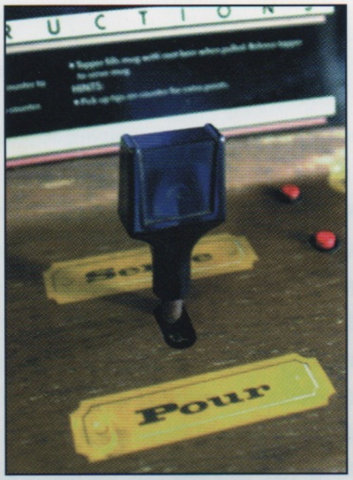
A fender behind Pole Position, Sega's awesome follow-up to Monaco GP established the slightly behind, slightly above viewpoint that would become a staple of the genre. Turbo kicked big butt, too: You rolled through rain and snow, over hill and dale, by night and by day in your attempt to pass 30 cars in a certain amount of time. It was like that car song "over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house we go", only much, much more cool.

cool controllers



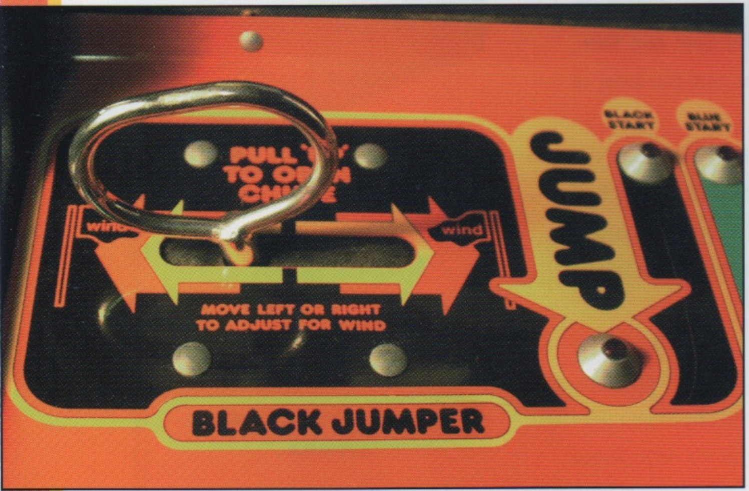
Lunar Lander (Atari, 1979)

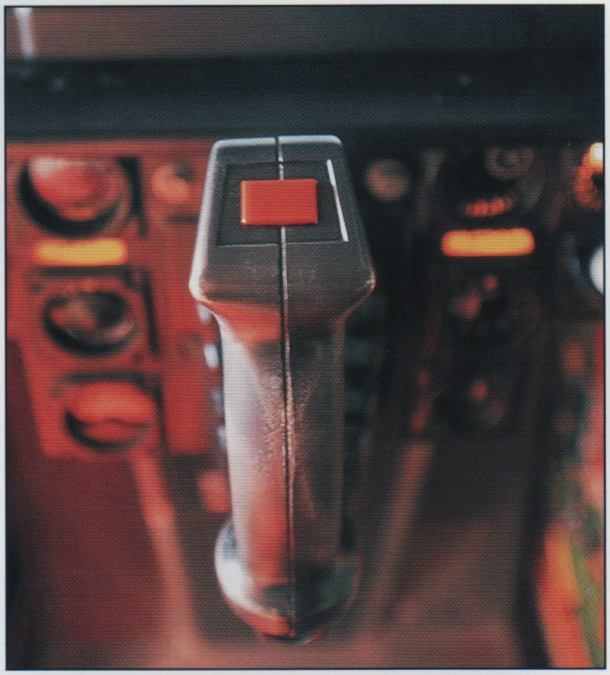
The funky plunger pictured here fired the retro-rockets in Atari's difficult vector-graphics spaced-pod simulator. See the abort button? It was your friend.


RUCTIONS
HINTS:
Serve
Pour

Root Beer Tapper (Bally Midway, 1984)

Want some rye? 'Course you do—or at least the A&W equivalent poured at Midway's glög shop. The actual beer tap seen here (and on Tapper, the beer-soaked version of Root Beer Tapper) got plenty of use during the frenetic game, which discouraged players from the barkeep profession.


PULL TO OPEN CHUTE
wind
wind
MOVE LEFT OR RIGHT TO ADJUST FOR WIND
JUMP
BLACK START
BLUE START
BLACK JUMPER



Skydiver (Atari, 1978)

Long before the Tom Petty song, you were free-falling with this early hit from Atari. The ring opened the chute and helped fight the strong crosswinds, but the ground—and the game—was harder than it looked.

Space Harrier (Sega, 1985)

Yet another visually innovative release from Sega, this psychedelic shoot-'em-up sported the coolest handle this side of Tron.

Q*bert

He was an unlikely hero:

cuddly as a koala, a tad pear-shaped, prone to jumping into oblivion, and with a nose bigger than Karl Malden's. Even so, the arcade-going public embraced Q*bert, and quicker than you could say ALF, the furry alien's ugly mug turned up everywhere you looked. Pretty good for a guy with a honker only a Q*mom could love.

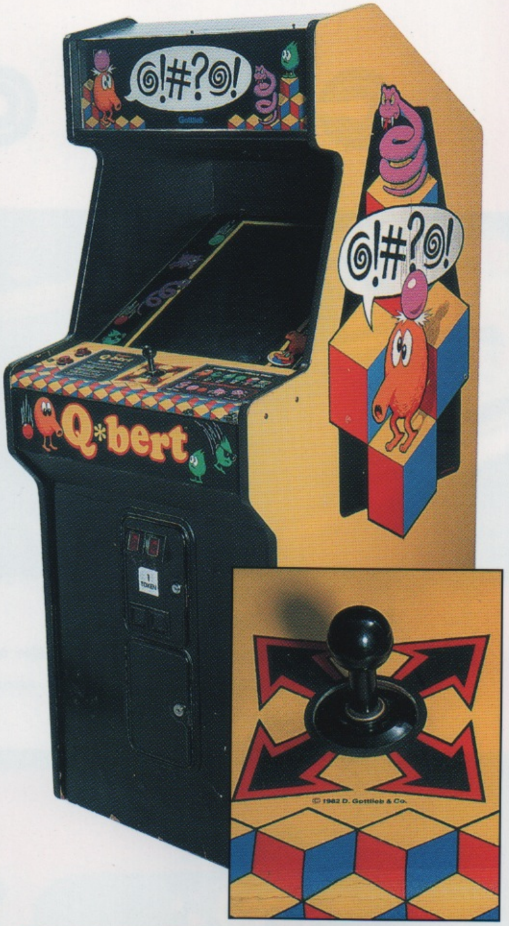
Like its asterisk-endowed title character, the game itself proved horribly addictive. Your goal was to change the colors of 28 tiles, a simple task that was greatly enhanced by the 3-D playing field and the pleasing "squish-squash" sound effects Q*bert made when he hopped diagonally around the pyramid. In addition to the annoying red balls that bounced down the structure, Coily, a determined but rather stupid serpent, frequently made life difficult for Q*bert. To shake him, you had to leap off the pyramid onto a spinning disc that transported you to safety; ultramaroon Coily jumped to his doom.

Other thorns in Q*bert's chubby side: Ugg and Wrong-Way, two ugly purple goons that tooled around the screen upside-down; and greenish gremlins Sam and Slick, who foiled Q*bert's hard work by reverting the colors of certain tiles, and the latter of which who did so wearing a cool pair of shades.

When an enemy killed Q*bert, the poor guy would yell "@!#?@!" In fact, all of the creatures talked in a strange, guttural language—though presumably only Q*bert had a potty mouth. One sound needed no translation: When you accidentally jumped Q*bert over the side of the pyramid in a space without a spinning platform, he would scream in bloody terror before landing with a nasty-sounding crunch.

The game quickly turned into a puzzling affair. On higher levels, which were broken up into four rounds each, squares had three colors and they changed every time you jumped on them; it took a modicum of strategy to get the colors to jibe. If you performed well enough, you might get to join the "Noser Elite," the game's high-score table. The top dog was dubbed the "Supreme Noser."

Hilariously, Q*bert almost wasn't called Q*bert at all. The first title that the character's creator came up with was "Snots and Boogers," because the hero originally shot deadly goo out of his snout. Rather than gross out potential customers, the design team generated a second title: "@!#?@!" (In fact, some release sported this title). Ultimately, Q*bert (Cube plus Hubert) won out. Still, can you imagine how much a "Snots and Boogers" T-shirt would be worth today?



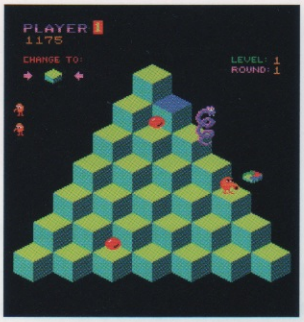
Game: Q*bert

Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Gottlieb

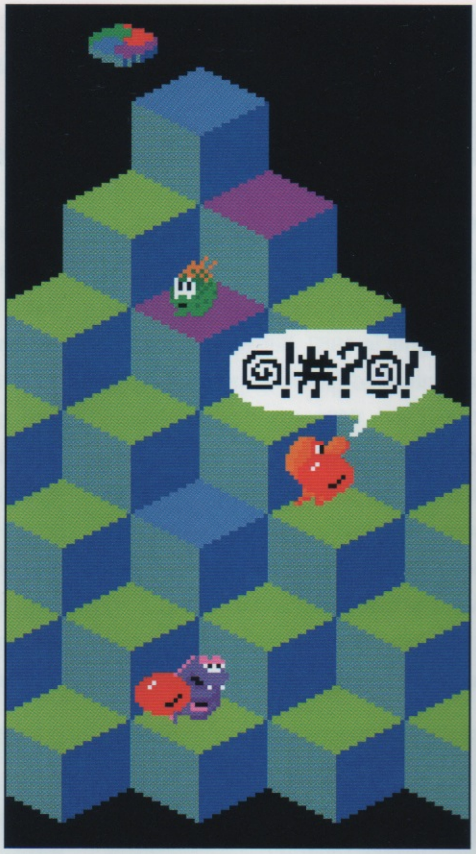
Controls: Four-direction joystick

Plot: As a fuzzy orange alien with a huge schnozz, hop around a pyramid grid changing the color of tiles and avoiding a dumb purple snake


PLAYER 1
1175
CHANGE TO:
LEVEL: 1
ROUND: 1

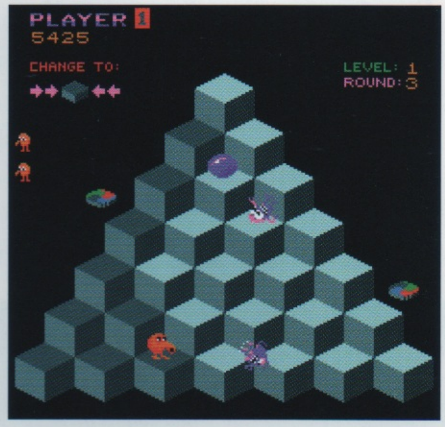
Q Tips

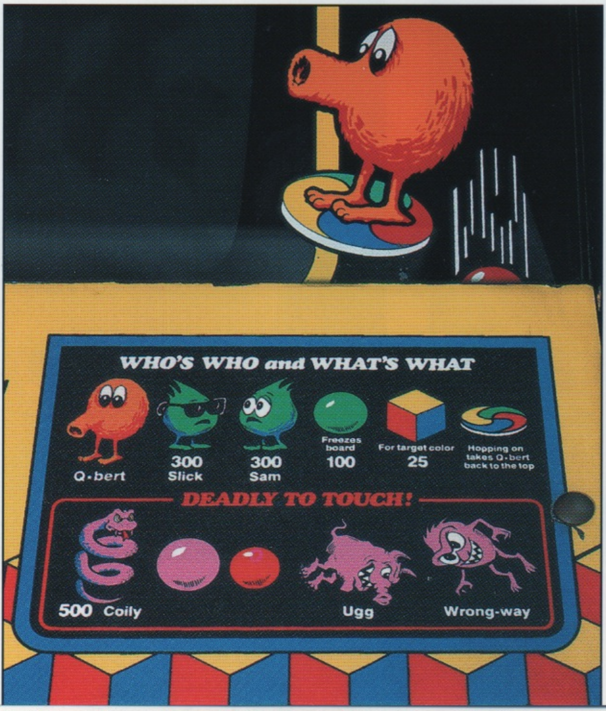
Although not nearly as successful as Pac-Man or Donkey Kong in terms of merchandising, Q*bert graced coloring books, trash cans, sleeping bags and joke books. Also, a well-wrought cartoon version of Q*bert appeared on CBS from 1983–86 as part of the inimitable *Saturday Supercade.* In this incarnation, Q*bert had arms, spoke English and, in one embarrassing episode, busted out with Michael Jackson's "Beat It."



Qubed Route

Q*bert's Qubes, the blink-and-you'll-miss-it 1983 sequel to Q*bert, took a more Rubik's Cube approach. Twenty-five cubes, each having three different colors, were arranged five-by-five in the shape of a diamond. When Q*bert leaped around the board, the cubes rotated in the direction he hopped. Like that old beanbag game Tic-Tac-Toe, the object was to get a row of five cubes facing the same direction. Q*bert was the only holdover from the original though; Coily had been replaced by an ugly rat.


PLAYER 1
5425
CHANGE TO:
LEVEL: 1
ROUND: 3


WHO'S WHO and WHAT'S WHAT
Q•bert
300 Slick
300 Sam
Freezes board 100
For target color 25
Hopping on takes Q•bert back to the top
DEADLY TO TOUCH!
500 Coily
Ugg
Wrong-way

Gottlieb
Q*bert
HOW TO PLAY
WHO'S WHO and WHAT'S WHAT
DEADLY TO TOUCH!
Q*bert

Williams
ROBOTRON:
2084
1 TOKEN

Robotron: 2084

Game: Robotron: 2084

Year: 1982

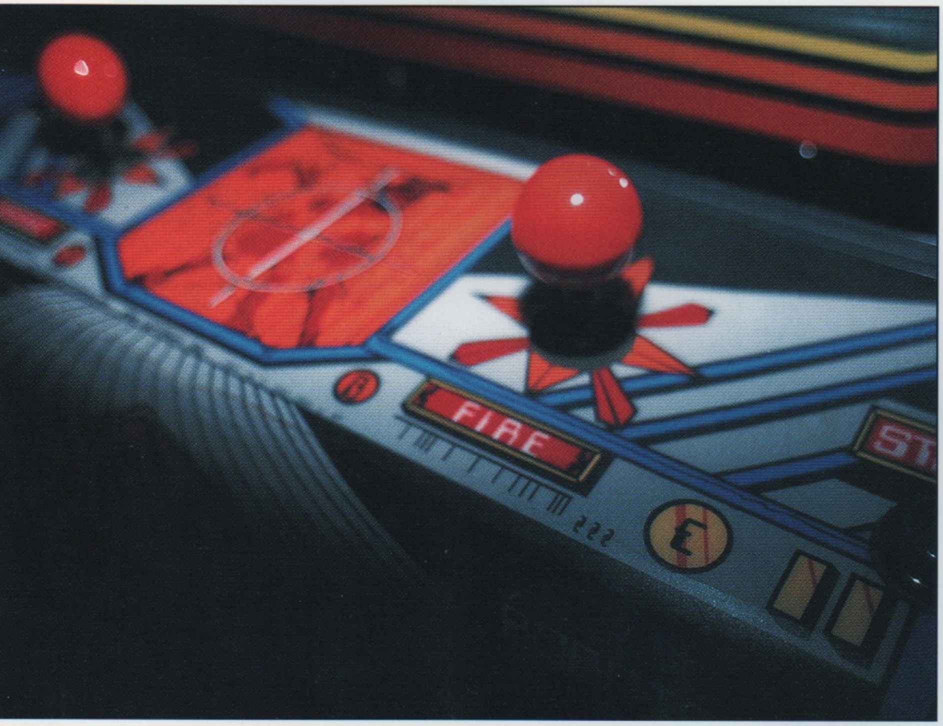
Manufacturer: Williams Electronics

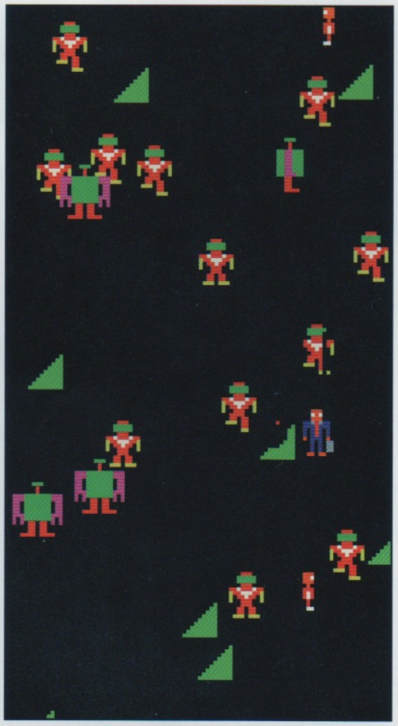
Controls: Eight-direction run joystick, eight-direction shoot joystick

Plot: Save a huge, extended human family from malicious robots and dangerous eggheaded mutants

Putting to the test the lewd theory that two joysticks are better than one, Robotron: 2084 sent players to orgiastic heights in 1982. But while you were guaranteed to get your rocks off while playing with Williams's sexy new product, your game typically lasted about as long as the average heartbeat. Don't worry: Robotron caused even the most jaded arcade masters to prematurely evacuate their place at the controls.

As humbling as Robotron was, the game sucked quarters out of so many pockets due to its extreme novelty and inherent coolness. The story, which predated eerily similar plotlines in *The Terminator* and *The Matrix,* was stuff of sci-fi legend: The supremely intelligent and creative Robotron woke up and smelled the alkaline fluid in the year 2084, and decided to eradicate mankind from the earth. Your guy—a good Samaritan who just happened to be a bug-eyed mutant with superpowers—was the last hope for the survival of the human race. Weep for the future.



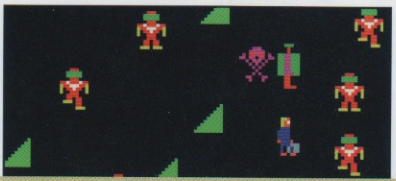


Bad Rap

The Beastie Boys name-checked Williams's frenzy-inducing release on their slammin' 1989 track "Sounds of Science", which appeared on the 1989 album *Paul's Boutique.* The goofed-up lyrics made no sense: "Ponce de Leon constantly on the Fountain of Youth, not Robotron. . . " Yo, shooting Brains can make you feel eternally young, too.

Your task was to "save the last human family" and to wipe out or avoid the methodical Robotron army on each level. This became increasingly impossible because there were soon more automaton jerks per square inch than potatoes in Idaho. These included dumb, stutter-stepping GRUNTs; blocky, indestructible Hulk assassins; and vehicular Enforcers and Tanks, which launched a kajillion projectiles in your general direction. Worst of all were the big-noggined Brainiacs, which slinked around the screen turning the helpless final family—consisting of briefcase-toting Daddy, pink-dressed Mommy and little brat Mikey—into electrically charged Progs. Life sucks when your own kind turns on you.

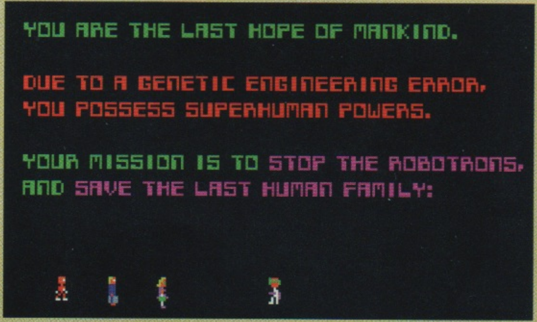
The only thing you had in your favor was pesky human unpredictability and that ingenious two-joystick mechanism, which considerably upped the ante established a few years earlier by the similarly themed Berzerk. This feature allowed you to run in one direction while firing in the other, and contorted your brain in two directions at once. Even after you got the hang of the controls, you'd be sweating profusely, treating the joysticks like trash and just running around like a chicken with its head cut off in the hopes that your lasers destroyed robots before they blasted you. Robotron-induced panic was the absolute worst—and the best.



Here are the Hemingway-length instructions that appear during Robotron's attract mode:

Inspired by his never quest for progress, in 2084 man perfects the Robotrons: A robot species so advanced that man is inferior to his own creation. Guided by their infallible logic, the Robotrons conclude: the Human race is inefficient, and therefore must be destroyed.

You are the last hope of mankind. Due to a genetic engineering error, you possess superhuman powers. Your mission is to stop the Robotrons and save the last human family: Mommy, Daddy, Mikey.

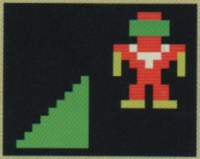


YOU ARE THE LAST HOPE OF MANKIND.

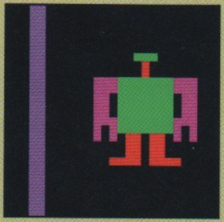
DUE TO A GENETIC ENGINEERING ERROR,
YOU POSSESS SUPERHUMAN POWERS.

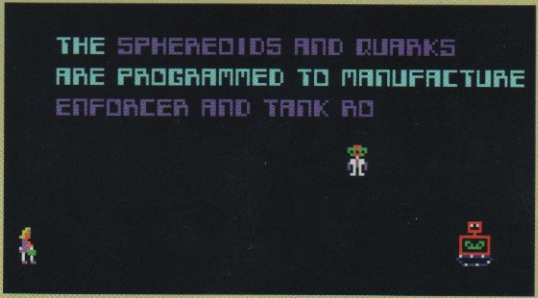
YOUR MISSION IS TO STOP THE ROBOTRONS,
AND SAVE THE LAST HUMAN FAMILY:

The force of ground roving unit network terminator (GRUNT) Robotrons seek to destroy you.

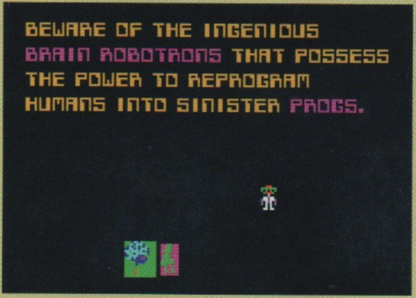


The Hulk Robotrons seek out and eliminate the last human family.



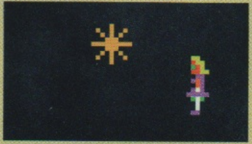


THE SPHEREOIDS AND QUARKS
ARE PROGRAMMED TO MANUFACTURE
ENFORCER AND TANK RO



BEWARE OF THE INGENIOUS
BRAIN ROBOTRONS THAT POSSESS
THE POWER TO REPROGRAM
HUMANS INTO SINISTER PROGS.

As you struggle to save humanity, be sure to avoid Electrodes in your path.



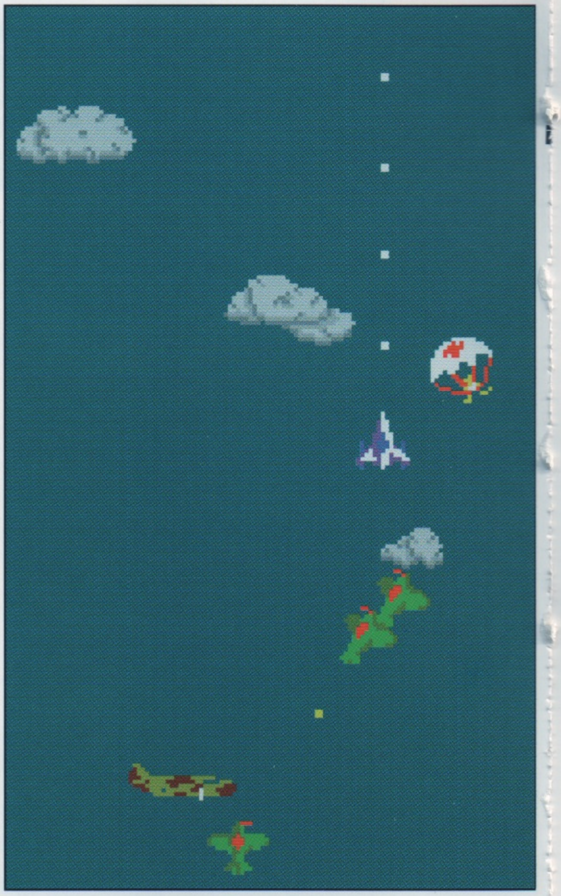
Time Pilot

Question: What gave the high-tech jet of Time Pilot, one of the most endearing releases of 1982, the uncanny ability to open up a portal to the ages? The straightforward Konami game, in which your plane surfed the fourth dimension to partake in fierce airborne dogfights, made no attempt to explain this phenomenon. Did the jet employ a flux capacitor, that excellent technology from *Back to the Future?* Did an otherworldly contraption, a la the Omni of the 1982–83 TV series *Voyagers,* create the possibility for interepochal exploration? Or was it this mysterious Time Pilot himself who possessed the gift to make the space-time continuum his bitch?

Whatever it was, the Time Pilot jet would be a welcome sight in the arcades of any era. It allowed you to see more decades than Dick Clark, escorting you through the dangerous skies of five different time periods over a whopping 91 years. Though historically challenged, the game thrust you into air battles against barnstorming-style biplanes, Vietnam-era helicopters, futuristic fighter planes and bothersome UFOs. Your only goal was to shoot everything in sight in order to move on ceaselessly through time. It was like a bad episode of *Quantum Leap.*

The jaunty theme music sent you on your way, first to A.D. 1910, where you encountered primitive propeller planes and a sluggish zeppelin. You continually shot your pellet-sized bullets at and did nifty loop-de-loops around the slow-moving aircraft, scooped up friendly parachutists and generally illuminated how far flight technology had come since the early years of the 20th century. In fact, your own worst enemy was often yourself: Rather than get picked off by enemy fire, you usually made the idiotic mistake of plowing directly into the biplanes. Get the hell out of the way, Red Baron dude!

Once you shot down the required 56 villains and popped the irksome balloon, you somehow created a rift in the universe and moved on to bigger and harder skirmishes (see "A Guide to the Eras," opposite), eventually winding up in the scary, flying saucer-infested "future" of 2001. But whither Time Pilot now that we have reached the early days of the 21st century? In the decidedly UFO-free present, we should look to the skies and fondly remember the efforts of our favorite time-travelling aviator.



Game: Time Pilot

Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Konami

Controls: Eight-direction joystick, fire button

Plot: Maneuver your futuristic bomber through war-torn eras of the past, present and future to neutralize as many enemy aircraft as possible

A Guide to the Eras

1910 A.D.

Despite the fact that there were no major conflicts to speak of in 1910, you found yourself smack dab in the middle of a doozy. Like Snoopy in his Sopwith Camel, those dullard biplanes and that Hindenburg ripoff were no match for your state-of-the-art flying machine.

1940 A.D.

The United States didn't enter World War II until 1941. Does this mean that Konami, a Japanese company, intended the titular top gun to be non-American? Doesn't matter. Splatter those green, possibly Nazi prop planes and ugly B-52s with artillery and get the "hiel" out of here.

1970 A.D.

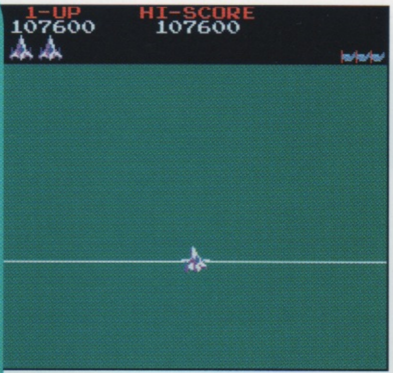
The most thrilling level out of the five, 1970 threw you into a Vietnam-era battle against not-so-archaic but absolutely tiny helicopters and their heat-seeking sidewinder missles. You love the smell of napalm in the morning!

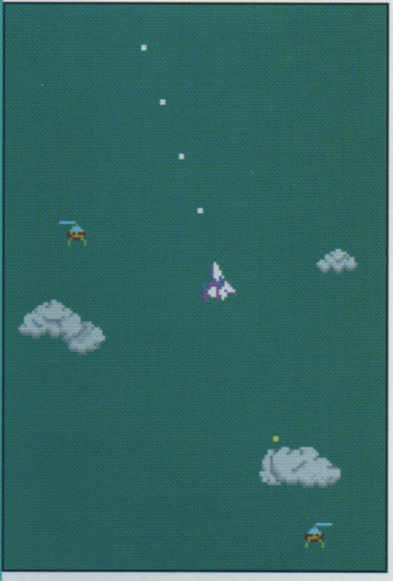
1982 A.D.

It was back to the future of 1982, where you confronted jets that look exactly like yours. Had your own compatriots turned on you? Probably not: These enemies were armed with homing missles and reeked of Russky. Tie a bandanna around your head and make like Rambo.

2001 A.D.

For his final mission, Time Pilot re-emerged from his time portal to join an apocalypic battle between man and alien. But these E.T.s did not like Reese's Pieces or say "Elliott." They hurled annoying smartbombs at you and practically ensured the death of your species.

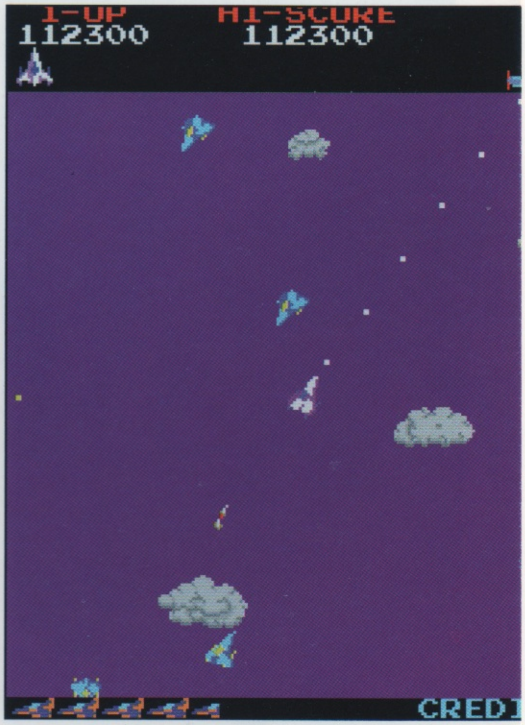




25¢
PUSH TO
REJECT

Pilot Episode

Time Pilot was the brainchild of rookie Konami designer Yoshiki Okamoto, who reportedly defied his boss's edict to create a driving game. When Time Pilot became an unqualified international success, the boss stole the credit and refused to give Okamoto a proper raise. The disgruntled designer parachuted over to fledgling manufacturer Capcom, where he is now a highfalutin executive game producer. His most notable project? He produced the 1991 genre-busting Street Fighter II, the game that launched a million secret moves. But let's cut him some Time Pilot slack, okay?

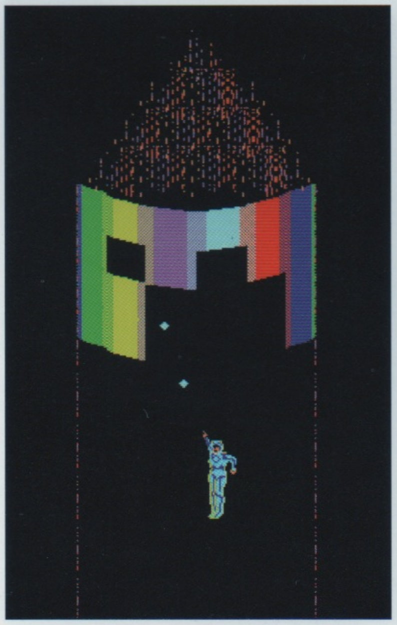


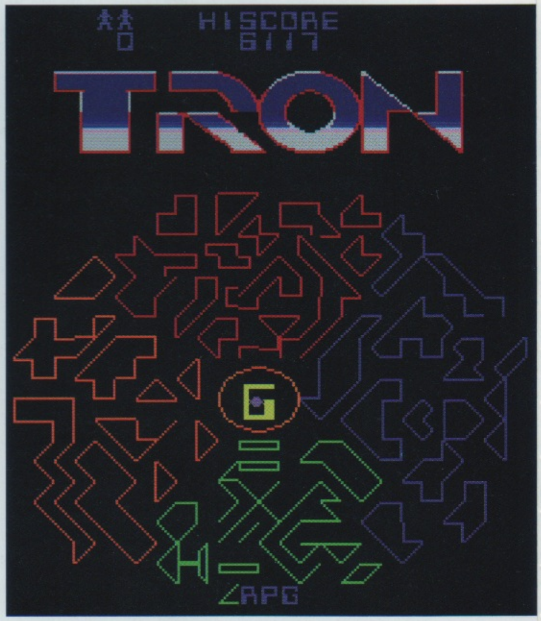
Tron

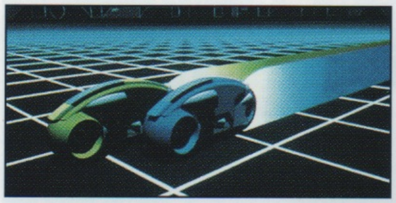
When Disney debuted a new movie called *Tron*, about a video-game designer who gets sucked inside a computer, pretty much anyone who had ever set foot in an arcade had a massive cream dream. Their orgasmic delight no doubt grew more intense when they went back to the arcade and, lo and behold, saw a eye-popping new machine standing where the Pooyan used to be. "Totally excellent," they said, after checking out Bally Midway's Tron, "Can I have $5 in tokens?"

The first arcade game to be spun off from a movie, Tron was as high concept as you could get in 1982. As Tron, the determined security program played by Bruce Boxleitner in the movie, your task is to get past increasingly difficult stages and progress from a low-level "RPG" to the ultimate "User." So, in essence, you were playing a computer program that was itself a computer program. It blew your mind!

The game, made up of four repeating stages, was as difficult to master as PASCAL. The hardest level simply instructed "Destroy all enemy tanks," but to do that you had to shoot fast-moving enemies three times, while they only had to nail you once. Not fair! Other stages: The grid-bug sequence, where you rapid-fired at quickly multiplying spiders in order to enter







the flashing communications tower; the frenetic, Breakout-inspired shootout at the whirling, multicolored MCP cone; and the exciting light-cycle stage, taken from the movie's best scene and which prompted you to lean forward tensely to maneuver your motorbike around rival yellow speedsters.

Many of the game's memorable sounds (the "byoo-byoo" of the light cycles) and songs (the inspiring grid-bug theme) were taken directly from the movie, and the cabinet depicted memorable Tron scenes.

Game: Tron

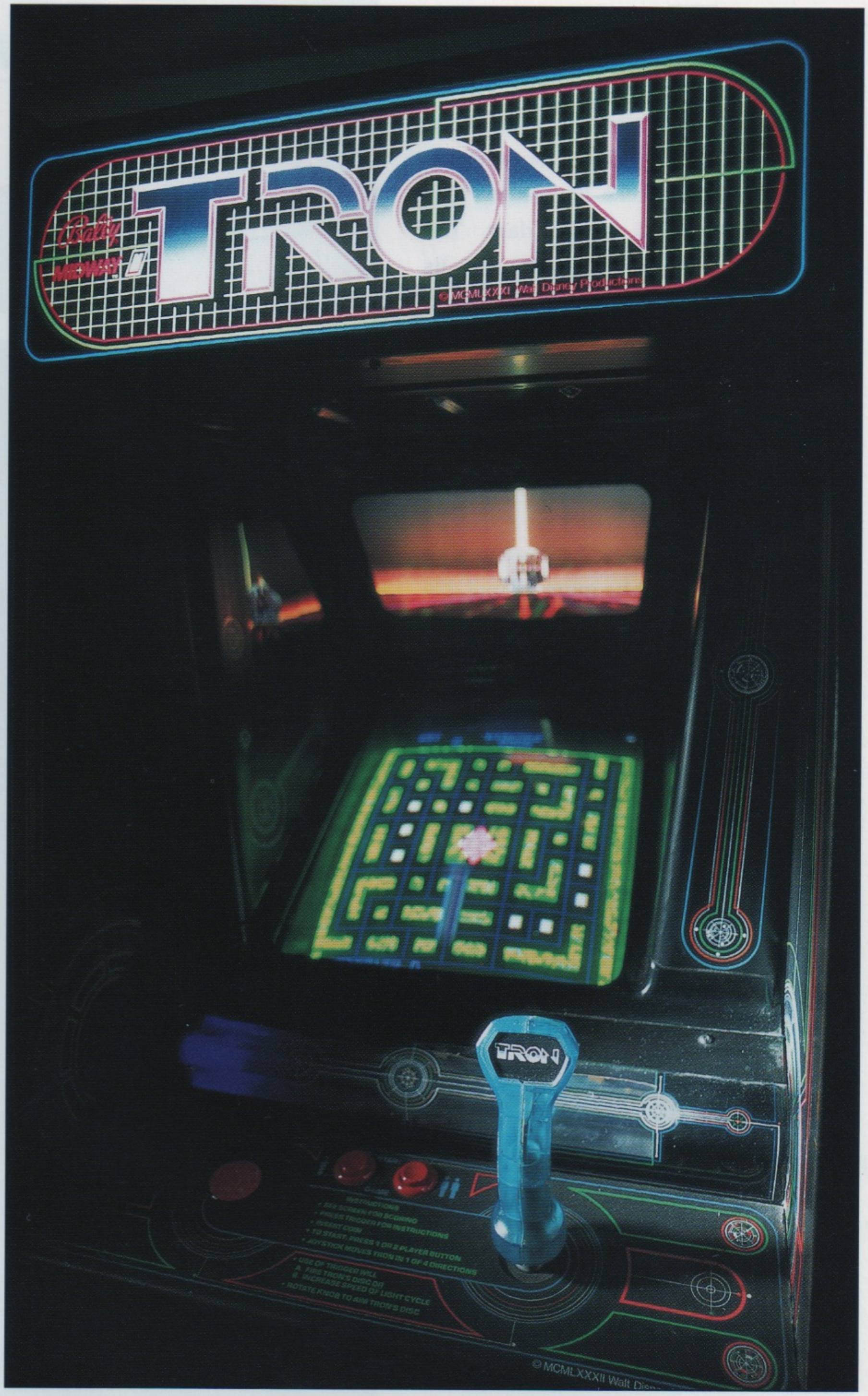
Year: 1982

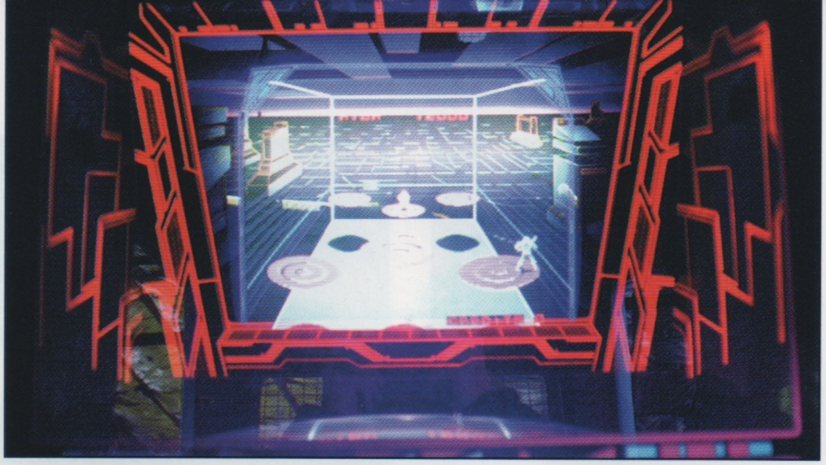
Manufacturer: Bally Midway

Controls: Eight-direction joystick with fire/throttle trigger, two-direction rotary dial

Plot: Get your blue-suited character Tron past enemy tanks, cyclists, bugs and microprocessors to achieve userhood

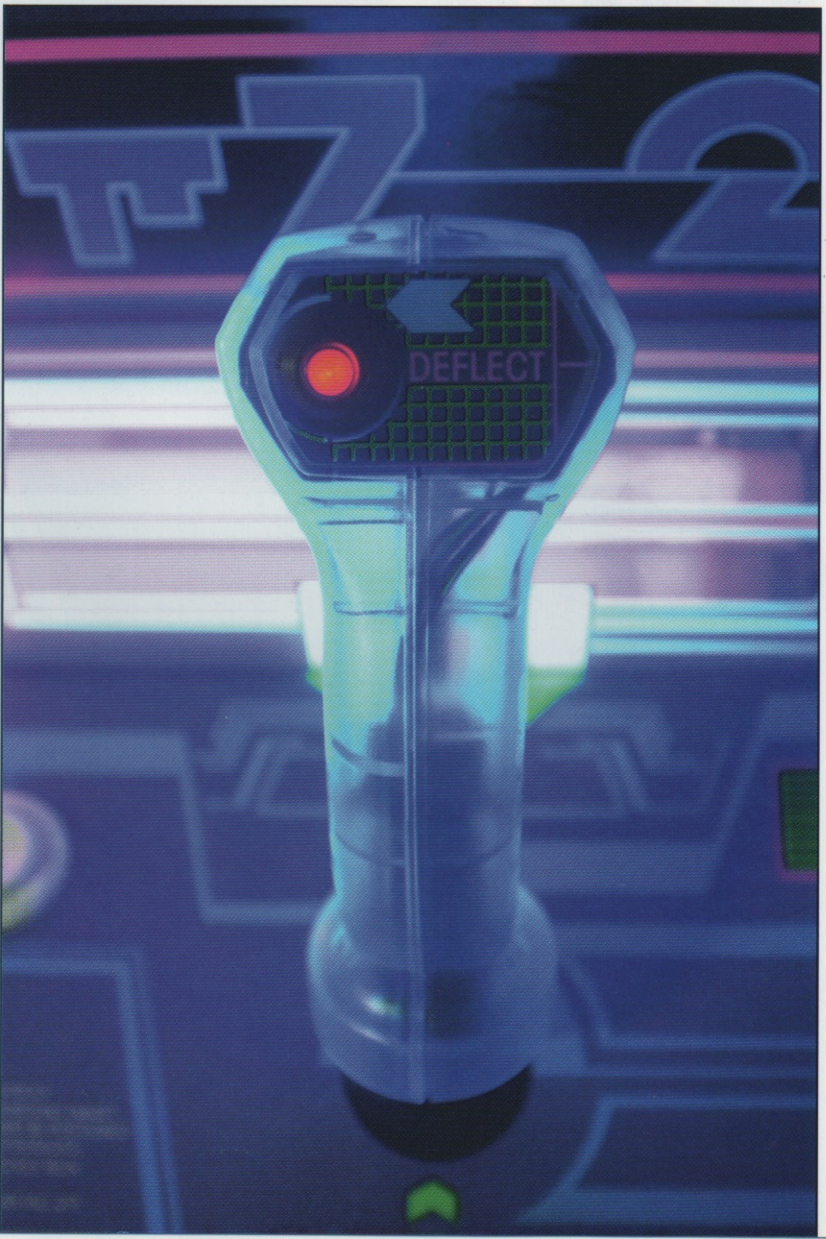
Major milestone: First video game to be a movie tie-in



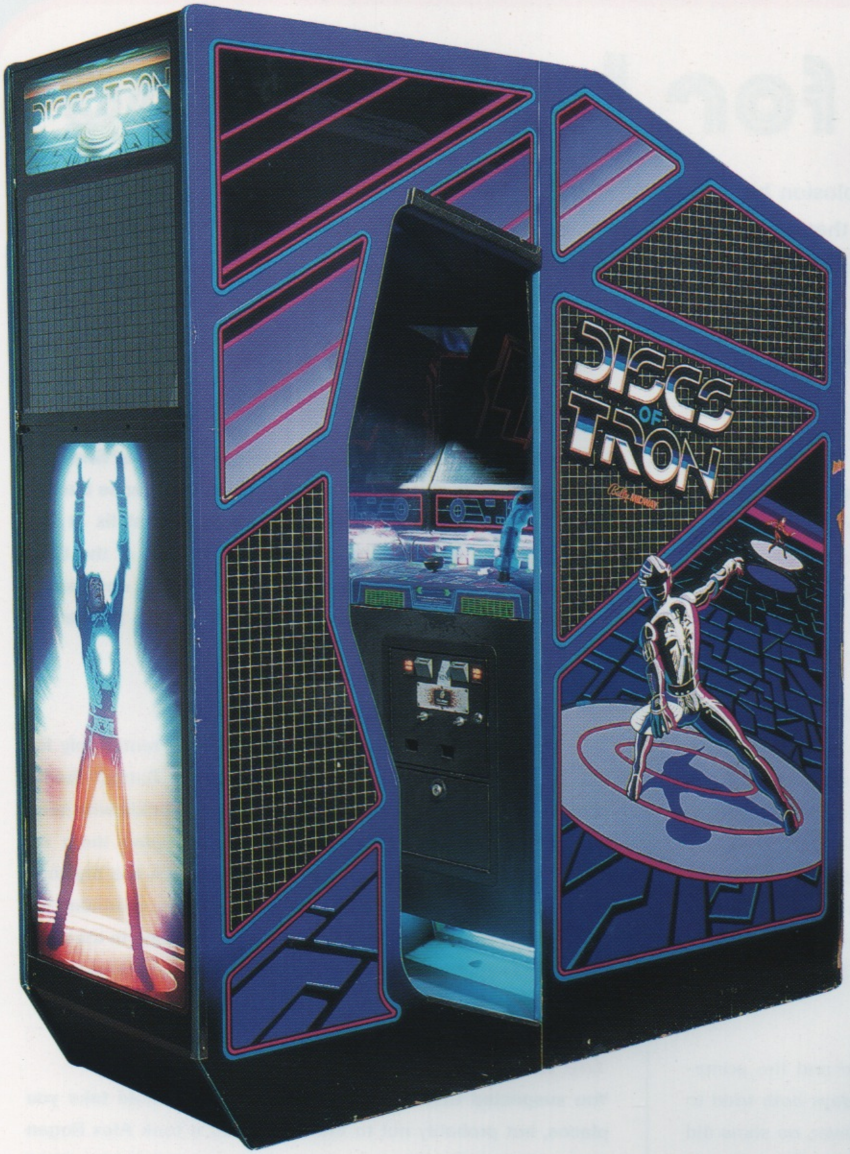


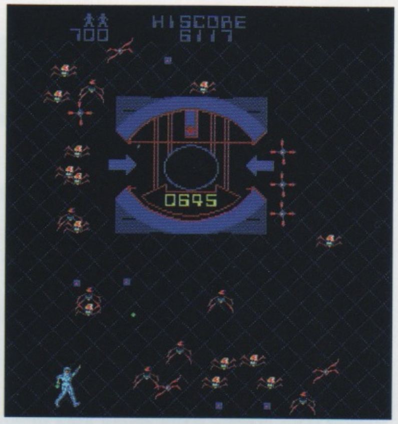
But Midway provided an entirely different and, arguably, more pleasurable experience than going to see the Disney flick, which turned out to be a box-office flop. The machine, sporting iMac-like flourescent blue paint, glowed in the dark. The translucent blue joystick and its trigger button felt good in the hand and looked like the throttle of a jet fighter. Each stage began with instructions being quickly typed across the screen, helping to remind you that you were, in fact, inside a computer. You believed it.

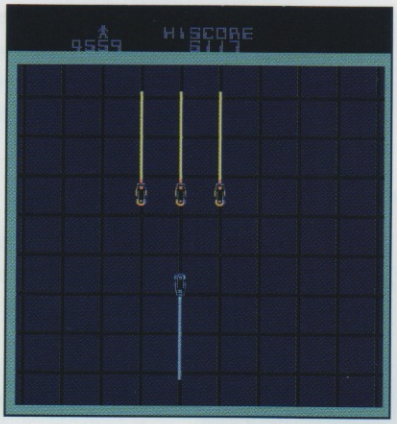
Disney, no doubt, never intended the game to be more memorable than the movie, which has deservedly become a cult classic itself. But it's the Bally Midway version of Tron which has held up over time; the game is just as exciting to play today as it was back in 1982. Even those kids who once praised Tron the movie as "totally excellent" would have to agree.

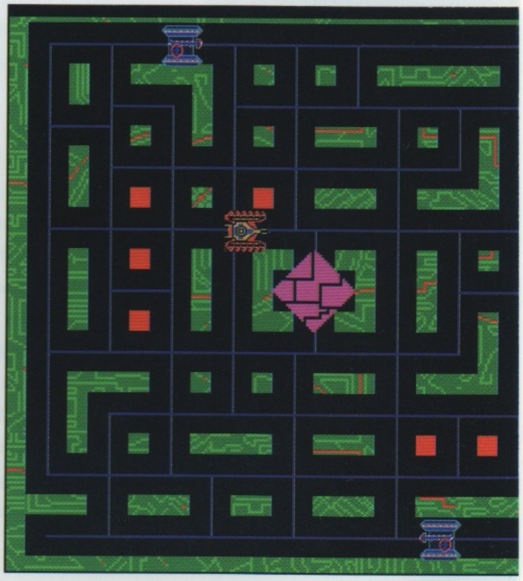


Wheel deal: Tomy's bitchin' toy light cycle









Tron Two

In 1983, Bally Midway followed up on its hit movie tie-in with Discs of Tron, based on an exciting scene from the film. In the racketball-like game, Tron attempted to knock the evil Sark (played with extreme nastiness in the film by David Warner) off a platform using his blue discs. As the levels progressed, Sark got more powerful and you had diminishing hope of avoiding his plasmatic projectiles. The addictive game was designed as part of the original Tron, but memory requirements and time constraints required that it be spun off as a sequel. One of the better results of this decision was Midway's cool environmental Discs of Tron cabinet, a tight-fitting encasement that you hunched inside to make the experience all the more realistic. It worked, too, even if it did make your haunches ache.

hooray for hollywood

In the early 1980s, the video-game explosion hit Hollywood like a Stargate smartbomb. Seemingly every movie or TV show was required to have a scene that took place inside an arcade, but only the few and the proud treated the subject with the respect it deserved. Here's what makes the *Arcade Fever* short list:

small screen

Diff'rent Strokes

Rather than strictly write about kids addicted to speed or alcohol, a morality play was devised about the perils of playing too many video games. Such was a delicious episode of *Diff'rent Strokes,* in which Arnold Jackson skipped school because he needed to master the made-up game Space Sucker. Whatchootalkin'bout, Atari?!?

DRAGON'S LAIR
DRAGON'S LAIR

Silver Spoons

Who didn't envy little Ricky Stratton? The brat owned more cool toys than Richie Rich. His piece de resistance was the game wall, lined at various points in time with a Pac-Man mini, Gorf, Tempest, Dragon's Lair and Asteroids. The Ricker rarely played them, but he occasionally availed himself of his only fictional machine, the fantastic Swamp Wars.

Square Pegs

While episodes of *Taxi* and the prime-time sketch series *Fridays* both tried to cash in on Pac-Man Fever, no show did it better than the short-lived sitcom *Square Pegs.* The entire half-hour focused on how nebbish Marshall Blechtman's addiction to the dot-gobbling classic was ruining his clever sense of humor. Comedy padre Father Guido Sarducci performs a video-game exorcism, and everything returns to pre-Pac-Man normalcy. Yeah, like that would work.

big screen

WarGames (1983)

This seminal 1983 flick's computerized catch phrase "Shall we play a game?" is clearly a rhetorical question, because hacker Daniel Luckman (Matthew Broderick) has mad skills at the arcade and on the keyboard. Near the beginning of the Cold War classic he is literally dragged away from an engrossing game of Galaga, and we all know how awesome he was at Global Thermonuclear War.

Nightmares (1983)

This four-segment horror anthology warrants a rental only for the movie's second story, entitled "Bishop of Battle." Emilio Estevez is at his *Repo Man* best as video-game junkie who bilks money from unsuspecting hoodlums by whipping them on Pleiades. He blows the winnings trying to reach the mystical 13th level of the fictional Bishop of Battle. Emilio, grounded for spending so much time on video games, sneaks out in the middle of the night and breaks into the mall's Game-O-Rama where he is eaten alive.

The Last Starfighter (1984)

You suspected that mastering a video game would take you places, but probably not to the extent that it took Alex Rogan (Lance Guest). The cornpone hero of this groundbreaking 1984 film gets so adept on The Last Starfighter machine found at his family's trailer park that he literally travels light years into space as a result. It seems that an interstellar federation has concocted the futuristic game (created by Atari but never released) as a way to recruit pilots for their struggle with an overwhelming enemy, and they abduct the freaky good Alex as their savior. He learns to confronts his fears and trust his instincts and becomes a better person for the experience. See—video games aren't so bad after all.

the tie-in crowd

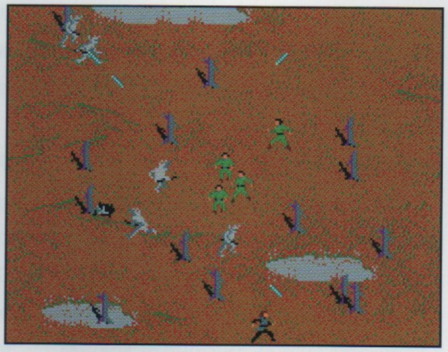
Tron may have been the first arcade game taken from a pop-culture phenomenon outside the arcade, but it certainly wasn't the last. Everyone remembers the Atari hits Star Wars (1983) and Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1985). Can you say the same about these obscure classics?

Star Trek (Sega, 1982)

Inspired by the success of *The Wrath of Khan,* Sega's Star Trek put you in the captain's chair of the U.S.S. Enterprise—sort of. Though fun to play, the vector-graphics game did little more than mix the Space Wars premise with that of Battlezone, except the ships looked familiar and your enemy happened to be the Klingons. Damn it, Jim—where were the voices of Spock, Bones and Kirk? Two phasers up for the cool Trek-emblazoned cabinet, though.

Krull (Gottlieb, 1983)

Attempting to steal a little of Tron's mojo, Columbia Pictures produced an arcade version of its gooey sci-fi flick *Krull.* Your task was to guide a prince past cylon-like Slayers and best the Beast, using cool little throwing stars called a Glaive. Sadly, the movie sucked hard, and no one much cared that the derivative Gottlieb game went to bed without supper.

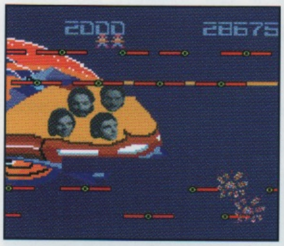


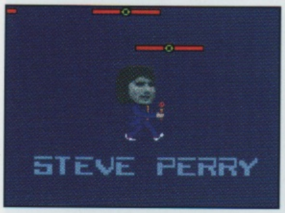
Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom (Sega, 1982)

Loosely based on the age-old Buck Rogers story, this lamely subtitled Sega rarity was notable for its snazzy 3-D effects and shockingly repetitive gameplay. Your ship resembled the one flown by Gil Gerard on the seminal 1979–81 television show *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century,* but the similarities ended there. Sega made a boo-boo by not employing Buck's quirky robotic sidekick Twiki. Beedy-beedy-beedy!

Popeye (Nintendo, 1982)

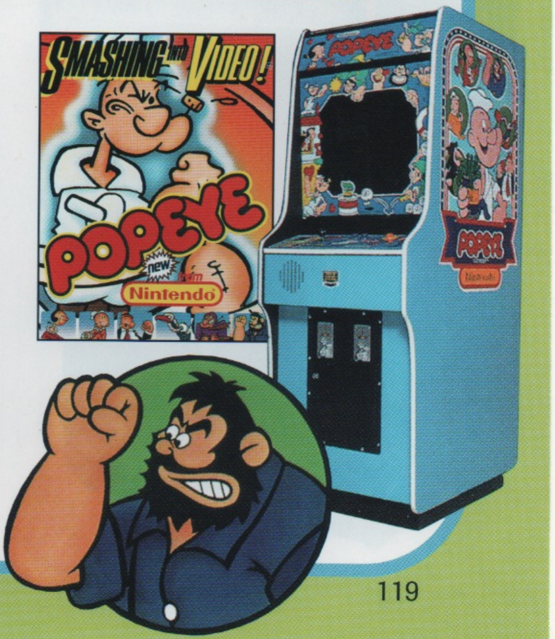
"I will gladly pay you Tuesday for a quarter to play Popeye today" was a sentiment quite a few people expressed back in 1982 when Nintendo released its colorful game starring the spinach-eating sailor man. After a few weeks of dropping buckets on Brutus's head and catching hearts from that bean pole Olive Oyl, many had switched to saying "I've had all I can stands, I can't stands no more!"

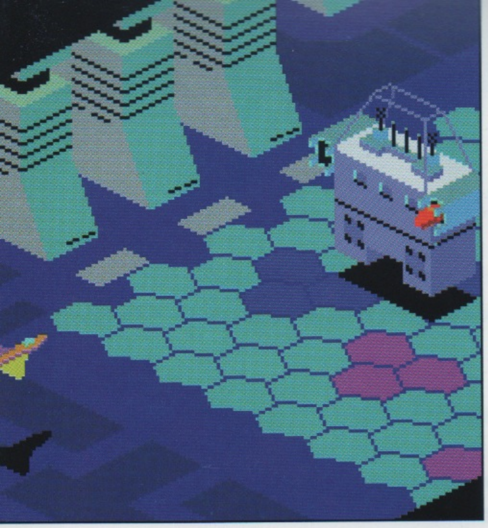




Journey (Bally Midway 1983)

It's ironic that the world's first rock n' roll arcade game starred the band that gave us the song "Anyway You Want It" because Bally Midway's Journey was about the last thing the world needed. The unorthodox entry called on fans to help the big-haired rockers find their missing "electro supercharged instruments" and side-step "wild alien groupoids" so the band could perform its 1983 hit "Separate Ways" at the Galactic Arena. Using cutting-edge technology, the goofy photographed faces of Steve Perry, et al., were pasted on tiny animated bodies. Sales might have increased if Bally Midway had gone with a better-looking musical wonder, like, say, Sheena Easton. Man, she was hot.





Zaxxon

Zaxxon, zaxxoff. Zaxxon, zaxxoff. Zaxxon, zaxxoff. . .

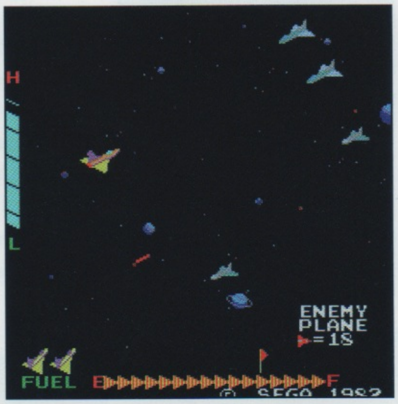
ZAXXON
ZAXXON
SEGA/Gremlin
FUEL

Like the Karate Kid being forced to buff Mr. Miyagi's car, it took you a while to understand the method behind the odd 1982 game Zaxxon's madness. You didn't see why it was necessary to view your attack shuttle from that kooky isometric perspective–slightly above, slightly to the side and slightly behind–when regular 2-D had always worked just fine. Ah, but once the rationale dawned on you after an afternoon of sinking quarters into the machine, Zaxxon hit you harder than a chop to the sternum. It certainly beat the heck out of waxing cars.

The graphical strangeness was, of course, necessary to pilot your stealth shuttlecraft adequately. Using an altimeter along the left-hand side of the screen, you guided your purple ship up and down and all around a heavily guarded space fortress. Pulling back on your ergonomic joystick would soar your plane over walls; pushing forward sent your guy down to the castle floor, where loads of fuel and other goodies awaited you. The difficulty of Zaxxon lay in correctly judging the height level of your ship, especially important when trying to sneak through the tiny breaches in the fortress walls. The riskiest endeavor of all was going for the points-rich satellite dishes in the extreme lower right or left corner after bounding over a high wall. Halfway toward the prize, your brain yelled "Abort! Abort!" But it was too late.

After maneuvering through the fortress, you'd encounter swirling enemy fighters in outer space. You couldn't hit them unless you were on their height level, and vice versa, and their movements were fairly spastic. If you hit one, the resulting explosion would rock your shuttle and bump it slightly up or down no matter how rigidly you gripped the joystick. The space scene was no fun.

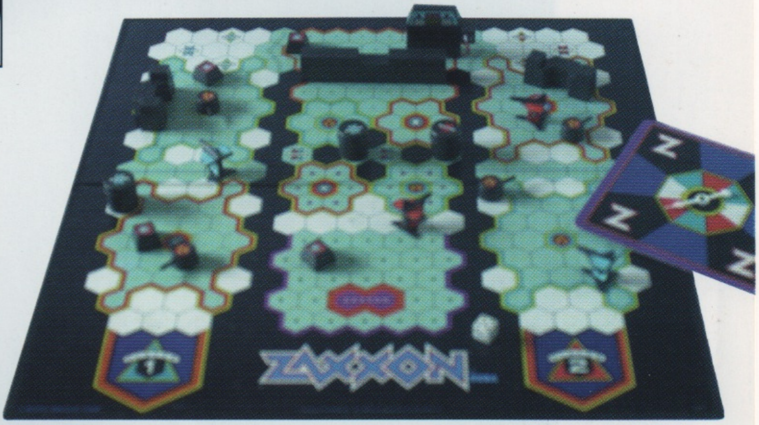
After a second run through the floating fortress, you squared off against the evil automaton Zaxxon, who lorded over his castle like Skeletor at Grayskull. Your ship, bravely hovering before him, needed to hit the homing missile in his shoulder six times before it launched. If you couldn't pin down Zaxxon, who sort of moonwalked from side to side, you'd get kayoed by his pesky projectile. But Miyagi had taught you well, young Daniel-san: Zaxxon, zaxxoff!

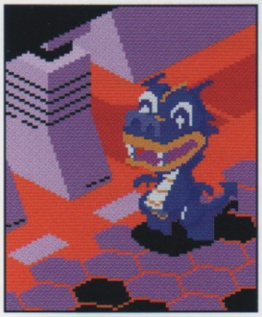


MB
ZAXXON
Ages 7-14
For 2 Players
MILTON BRADLEY Company
Based on the Action-Packed Arcade Game by SEGA
ZAXXON Game

Name Game

Milton Bradley adapted Zaxxon into a two-player board game in 1983, as it had done with other arcade titles like Berzerk, Pac-Man and Frogger. It may as well have been called a "bored" game, because that's the effect it had on recommended age group 7–14.





Lost in Space

Later in 1982, Sega unleashed Super Zaxxon, which sped up the action and made navigation even more difficult by adding hidden tunnels and crazier obstacles. Strangely, the Gobot-like villain Zaxxon had evolved into a cutesy fire-breathing space dragon—an unfortunate switcheroo that considerably diminished the original's "cool" factor.

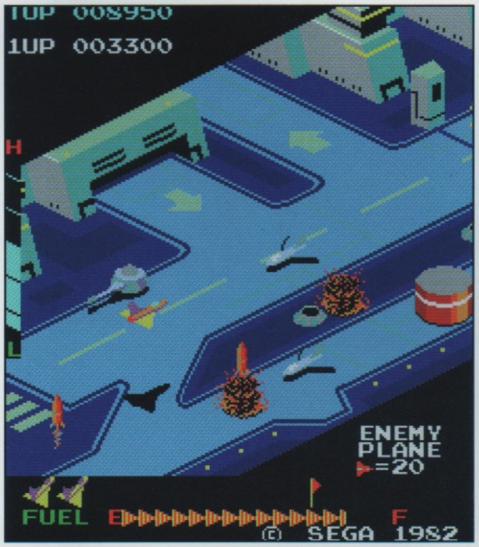
Game: Zaxxon

Year: 1982

Manufacturer: Sega Gremlin

Controls: Eight-direction joystick, fire button

Plot: Relieve a space fortress of oil and other precious resources while avoiding the booby traps and space armada commanded by the huge robot warlord Zaxxon


1UP 008950
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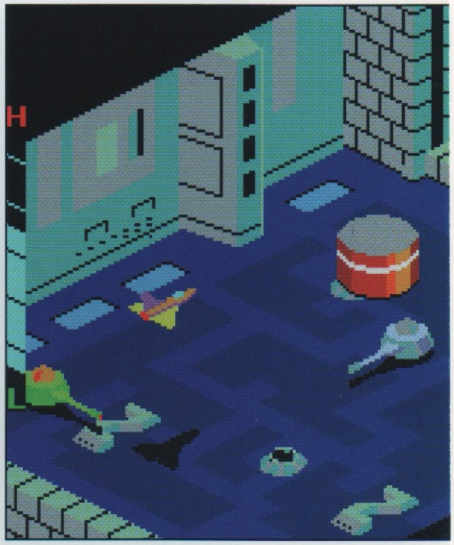
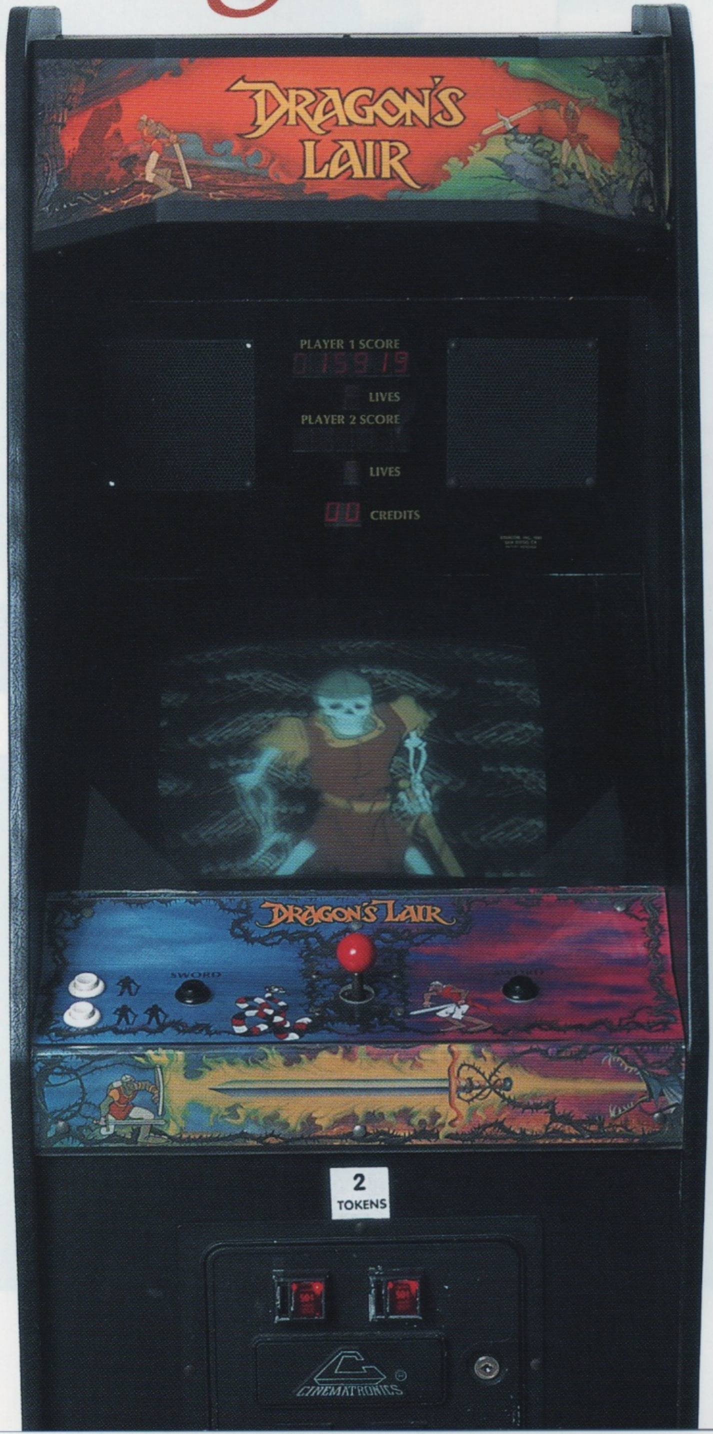
© SEGA 1982



Dragon's Lair


DRAGON'S LAIR
PLAYER 1 SCORE
LIVES
PLAYER 2 SCORE
LIVES
CREDITS
DRAGON'S LAIR
SWORD
2
TOKENS
CINEMATRONICS

For weeks you had heard rumors that something called a "laser disc" was coming to your lucky arcade, and pretty much anything that contained the word "laser" was cool by you. Still, nothing could prepare you for your first eyeful of Cinematronics' wondrous Dragon's Lair, a head-spinning new direction in the video-game experience. You were so geeked up to try out the revolutionary product—which looked like a Disney cartoon that you could actually control—that you didn't even mind that it cost you 50 cents a pop. It was easily worth two games of Pooyan.

Game: Dragon's Lair

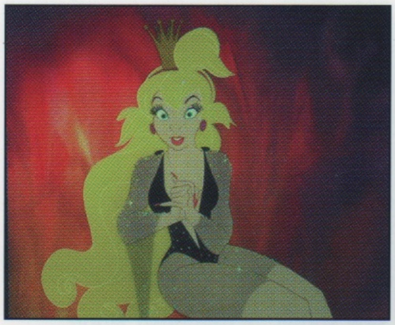
Year: 1983

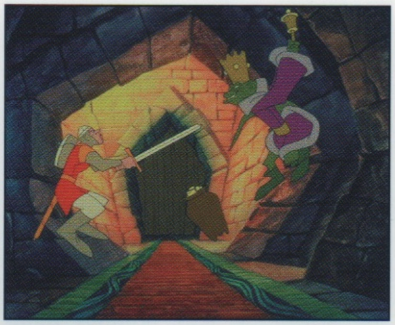
Manufacturer: Cinematronics

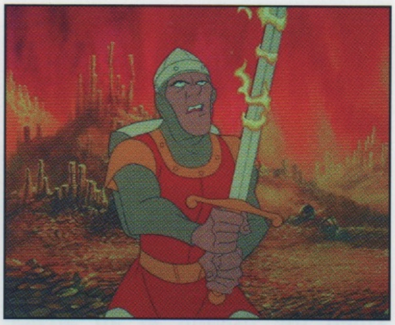
Controls: Four-direction joystick, "sword" button

Plot: As intrepid adventurer Dirk the Daring, make sensible choices in order to rescue your incredibly ditzy girlfriend Daphne from the clutches of the evil dragon Singe

Major milestone: The most successful laser-disk game







Even though it wasn't technically the first laser-disc game (that honor goes to Bally Midway‘s unplayable and ultimately delayed Astron Belt) and may not even have been the best (Cliff Hanger, anyone?), Dragon's Lair is the Holy Grail that everybody remembers. And man, did the game hum. With animation by Don Bluth Films, creators of the 1982 fave *The Secret of NIHM,* the thing was like the arcade adaptation of a "Choose Your Own Adventure" book. In the attract mode, the ham narrator perfectly summed up the plot: "Dragon's Lair—the fantasy adventure where you become a valiant knight on a quest to rescue the fair princess from the clutches of an evil dragon." To which most people replied: "Give me some of that."

Randomly mixing up about 25 minutes of animation over nearly 30 different missions, the game allowed you to strap on a codpiece to become Dirk the Daring, an anvil-jawed warrior who rummaged around a haunted castle in search of the kidnapped—and insanely sexy—princess Daphne. Dirk muddled through encounters with giant skeletal hands, rabid rodents, oversized marbles, black knights, and, if you invested enough quarters, the nasty dragon Singe himself. Your reward: A chance to glimse the babelicious Daphne in the skimpiest outfit this side of Leia's slave-girl get-up in *Return of the Jedi.*

You arguably had to be of a certain age to lose yourself entirely to the Dragon's Lair experience. If in 1983 you were under the age of, say, 16, you found nothing at all the matter with shoving those two tokens repeatedly into the game, calling the pricey hints hotline whenever you got stuck or staying up late at night priming yourself for the tough showdown with the Mud Men. The benefits were obvious: arcade glory. While almost everyone had heard of a person who had

Dead End

You didn't just die in Dragon's Lair. When you made the wrong move, the scene would play itself to show you the grisly means of your demise. After you finally lost all your guys, Dirk faced the camera and turned into a crumbling skeleton. Chances are you saw this scenario a lot.

1983

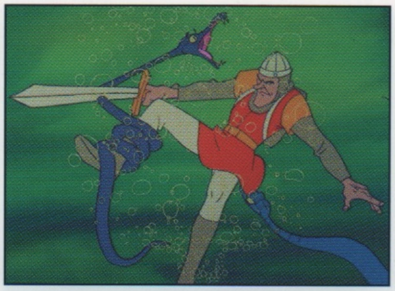
In headlines:
Space Shuttle takes magic carpet ride; Cabbage Patch Dolls beat stuffing out of good sense

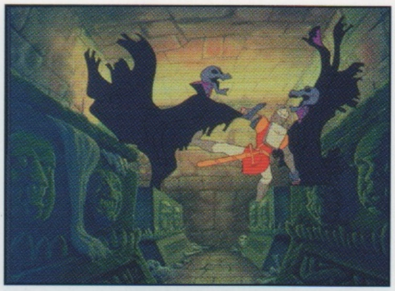
At theaters:
Risky Business shows us Tom Cruise's underpants; Ewoks nearly thwart *Return of the Jedi*

On TV:
Michael Jackson bewilders nation with moonwalk; "Where's the Beef?"; America loves it when an *A-Team* plan comes together

In music:
"Sweet Dreams" are made of Annie Lennox's hair; Prince's "1999" seems a lifetime away

DRAGON'S LAIR
SWORD
SWORD
2
TOKENS



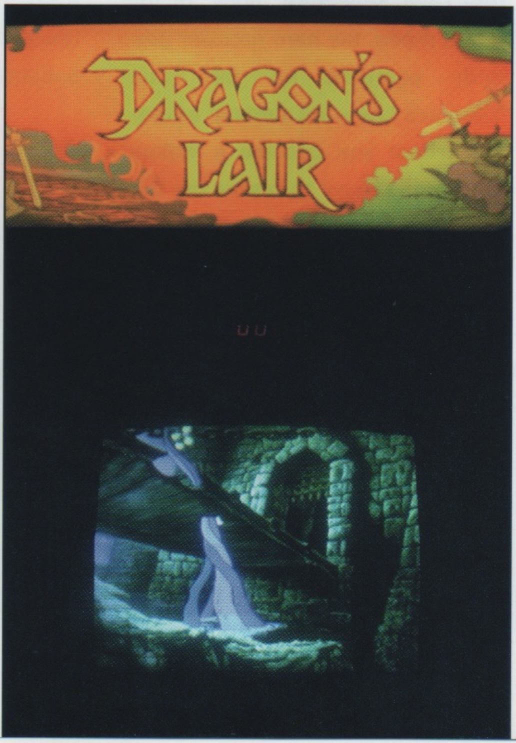


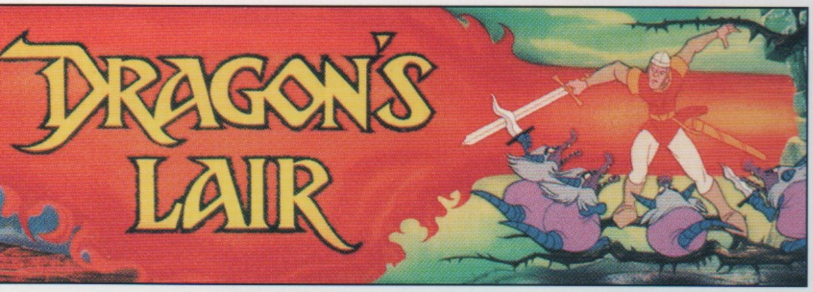
killed the dragon at an arcade across town, one of the biggest thrills you ever had at an arcade was the first time you saw someone perform the feat for yourself (probably by watching one of those crowd-pleasing extra monitors that certain arcade managers mounted on top of the cabinet). That could be you! Of course, entranced fanatics didn't notice or wouldn't admit to the game's many shortcomings. Not only was the name problematic—shouldn't it be Dragon Slayer?—but the adventure was nothing more than a series of memory tests instead of true feats of skill. It could be repetitive, also, and seemed like every other board was the stupid "Ye Rapids" level (where Dirk goes, "Huh?") or the out-of-control elevator scene (where Dirk screams like a ninny). Plus, arcade owners had a love-hate relationship with it: The game cost around a whopping $4,500 brand new, the laser-disc system was always breaking down and people lost interest after they saw someone demolish Singe.

Initially predicted to provide CPR for the dying arcade industry, Dragon's Lair soon led manufacturers even further toward the morgue. Subsequent stabs at laser-disc success—and nearly everyone and their sister got into the game—failed to generate the same brisk business that Bluth's first masterpiece did. Not that Dragon's Lair aficionados regret anything: What would the world have been like without the Giddy Goons?

Dragon's Fare

Not surprisingly, the kid-friendly game generated the same marketing frenzy typically reserved for Disney. With enough dough, you could own Dragon's Lair lunch boxes, binoculars, T-shirts, books, trading cards and posters. The biggest tie-in of all was the ABC Saturday morning *Dragon's Lair* (1984–85), which chronicled the further adventures of our man Dirk as he continually rescued the princess from the insouciant dragon Singe. Plus, the megahit turned up on little Ricky Stratton's wall of games on *Silver Spoons,* further giving America "Ricker envy." What didn't that brat have?





laser daze

After Dragon's Lair struck arcade gold, nearly every manufacturer staked a claim during the great laser-disk rush of 1983-84. Sadly, none of these games panned out, at least not in comparison to Dirk the Daring's sizable haul. Here are some memorable entries:

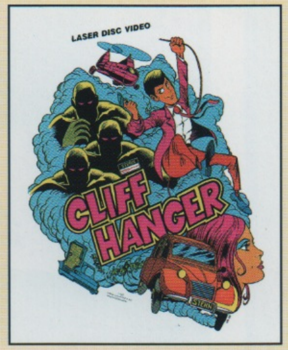
Astron Belt (Bally Midway, 1983)

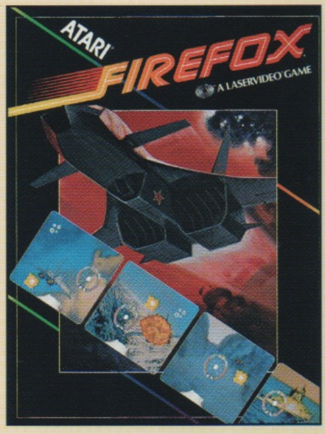
Designed by Sega, Astron Belt can claim to be the first laser-disc arcade game ever created, if not the first to be released. Maybe the star-fighting flop should have been shelved altogether: Its corny visual effects and unresponsive joystick relegated it to laser-disc also-ran. Even so, a sequel, Galaxy Ranger, came and went one year later.

CLIFF HANGER
CLIFF HANGER

Cliff Hanger (Stern, 1983)

Stern's piece of the laser pie, based on a popular Japanese cartoon, put you in the spy-tracking shoes of Cliff, a vaguely simian martial arts expert who had to save a petite beauty. Cliff Hanger benefited from looking like the cool afterschool anime extravaganza *Star Blazers,* plus it allowed you to fight ninjas at the height of the ninja craze of 1983-84. Not too shabby.





Firefox (Atari, 1983)

Based on the thrill-a-minute Clint Eastwood flick, Atari's quarter-sucking Firefox told the tale of an ace jet pilot sent to steal the world's greatest military plane from the Russkies. That was no small task given the number of enemy MIG fighters, the brevity of your fuel supply and the sloppy "Star Wars" control yoke. Though much of it was taken straight from the movie, the fast-paced action simply didn't give players much of a return on their 50- (or even 75-) cent investment.

M.A.C.H. 3 (Mylstar, 1983)

Gottlieb's foray into the laser-disc arena featured superb enough gameplay to propel M.A.C.H. 3 into a modest hit. You could play one of two different games for two credits: Fighter Game, in which you bombarded ground targets and oncoming aircraft; and Bomber Game, which cut back on the aircraft part. And here's some serious laser-disc trivia: M.A.C.H. stood for Military Air Command Hunter.

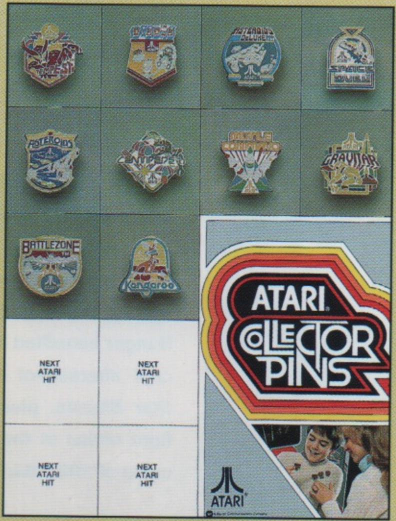
Space Ace (Cinematronics, 1984)

Don Bluth's more clever follow-up to Dragon's Lair once again forced you to memorize the moves to play to the end—a very expensive endeavor indeed. Those who shelled out got to control Dexter, a resourceful twerp who had been shrunk to pint-size by the nefarious space villain Borf. Along with his all-grown-up gal pal Kimmy, Dex traveled the galaxy to exact revenge and find the technology to balloon back into the heroic Space Ace. Bravo!

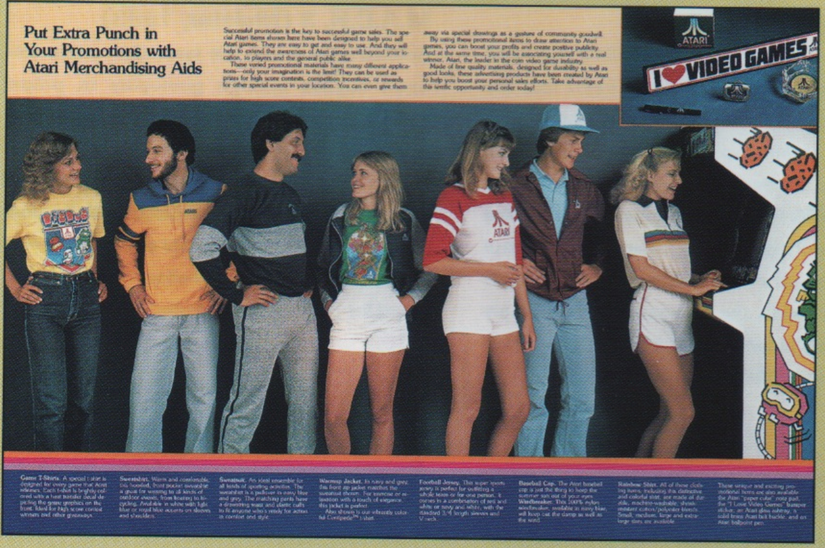
Us vs. Them (Mylstar, 1984)

Arguably the cheesiest entry of the bunch, Us vs. Them requested that you save Earth's frightened citizens from an alien horde. Throughout the game, the action was interrupted by goofy scenes in which real actors portraying everything from picnickers to the cornpone American Gothic duo showed you just how panic-stricken the American public had become. Mommy, make it stop!

objets d'arcade



@!#?@!
Q*bert
© 1982 D. Gottlieb & Co.



Put Extra Punch in Your Promotions with Atari Merchandising Aids

Successful promotion is the key to successful game sales. The special Atari items shown here have been designed to help you sell Atari games. They are easy to get and easy to use. And they will help to extend the awareness of Atari games well beyond your location, to players and the general public alike.

These varied promotional materials have many different applications—only your imagination is the limit! They can be used as prizes for high score contests, competition incentives, or rewards for other special events in your location. You can even give them away via special drawings as a gesture of community goodwill.

By using these promotional items to draw attention to Atari games, you can boost your profits and create positive publicity. And at the same time, you will be associating yourself with a real winner, Atari, the leader in the coin video game industry.

Made of fine quality materials, designed for durability as well as good looks, these advertising products have been created by Atari to help you boost your personal sales efforts. Take advantage of this terrific opportunity and order today!

Game T-Shirts. A special t-shirt is designed for every game that Atari releases. Each t-shirt is brightly colored with a heat transfer decal depicting the game graphics on the front. Ideal for high score contest winners and other giveaways.

Sweatshirt. Warm and comfortable, this hooded, front pocket sweatshirt is great for wearing to all kinds of outdoor events, from boating to bicycling. Available in white with light blue or royal blue accents on sleeves and shoulders.

Sweatsuit. An ideal ensemble for all kinds of sporting activities. The sweatshirt is a pullover in navy blue and grey. The matching pants have a drawstring waist and elastic cuffs to fit anyone who's ready for action in comfort and style.

Warmup Jacket. In navy and grey, this front zip jacket matches the sweatsuit shown. For exercise or relaxation with a touch of elegance, this jacket is perfect.

Also shown is our vibrantly colorful Centipede™ t-shirt.

Football Jersey. This super sports jersey is perfect for outfitting a whole team or for one person. It comes in a combination of red and white or navy and white, with the standard 3/4 length sleeves and V neck.

Baseball Cap. The Atari baseball cap is just the thing to keep the summer sun out of your eyes.

Windbreaker. This 100% nylon windbreaker, available in navy blue, will keep out the damp as well as the wind.

Rainbow Shirt. All of these clothing items, including this distinctive and colorful shirt, are made of durable, machine-washable, shrink-resistant cotton/polyester blends. Small, medium, large and extra-large sizes are available.

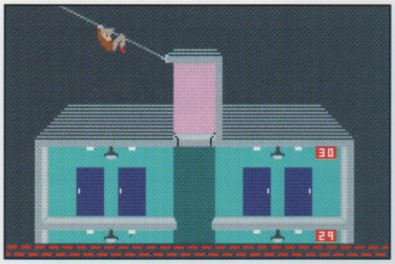
These unique and exciting promotional items are also available: the Atari "paper cube" note pad, the "I Love Video Games" bumper sticker, an Atari glass ashtray, a solid brass Atari belt buckle, and an Atari ballpoint pen.

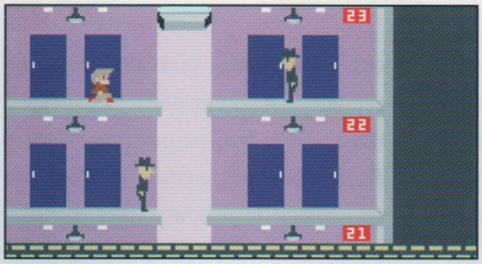
booty call

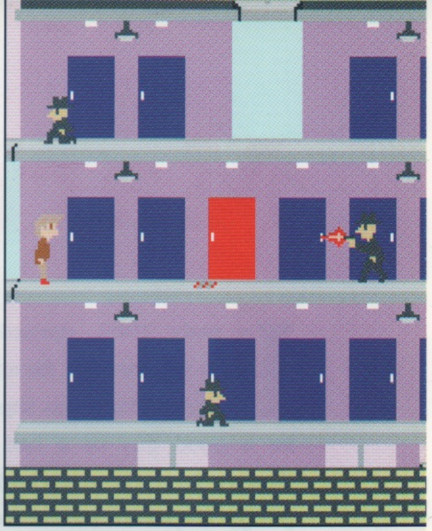
Loot based on the hot video-game properties included (counter-clockwise from top left) an Atari shirt we'd all kill for; some game-specific Atari pins, including a knockout Kangaroo; a Q*bert Frisbee for the @!#?@! of it; and a slick Tomy handheld Tron game.

TOMYTRONIC
TRON
TRON CYCLE SARK MCP
© 1981 Walt Disney Productions

Elevator Action







Game: Elevator Action

Year: 1983

Manufacturer: Taito

Controls: Four-direction joystick, fire button

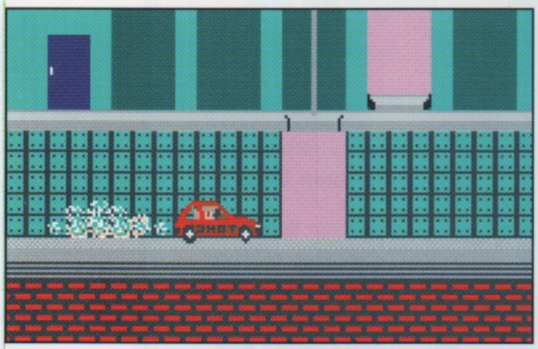
Plot: Retreive top-secret documents from a 30-story building infested with men in black and zoom off in your getaway car

His boots were made for mockin', so that just what we'll do: Why did such a cool guy as the hero of Taito's excellent 1983 cloak-and-dagger game Elevator Action wear those hideous red kickers? Our sartorially challenged industrial spy could have at least chosen an outfit to match, but instead elected to throw on a clashing brown ensemble. How gauche!

But clothes don't make this secret agent man. Armed with a pistol and a massive blonde pompadour, the Elevator Action guy—whose name is officially Otto, but don't ever, ever call him that—was at the top of the espionage game. From the moment he shimmied down a rope onto the roof of that first 30-story complex, you knew he had the skills to back up his misguided decision to don those ugly elfin boots.

Your object was to work your way down the building to the ground floor after collecting all of the secret plans from rooms marked by a red door. This was not easy, as the place was chock full of black-clad dudes intent on popping a cap in your ass, and the complex elevator system made their whereabouts unpredictable. You could shoot the bad guys, of course, but it was often more satisfying to knock them silly with a well-timed karate kick or by dropping an overhead light on their noggins. Once your mission was accomplished, you'd jump into your nicely matching red getaway car and then infiltrate another goon-infested building.

About the only bad aspect about the otherwise-addictive Elevator Action was the goofy nickelodeon-style music that tormented you throughout the game. On a scale of "one to cool", the theme was decidedly stuck at zero. Perhaps even more incongruously, the game featured certain floors that were only accessible by escalator. Elevator & Escalator Action just wouldn't have the same ring to it.



Beats "Honkey Lips"

Your candy-apple red get-away car, which waited for you on Level B1 after you cleared a building, was curiously emblazoned with the word "SHOT." Maybe because it peeled out as if it had been "shot" out of a cannon?

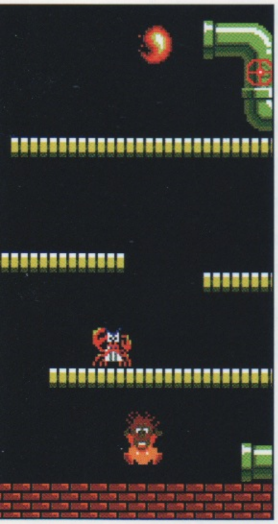
Mario Bros.

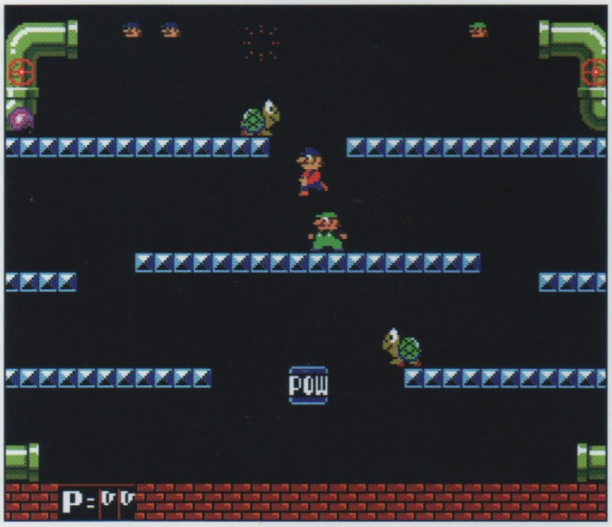
In early 1983, darned if you knew whether the hirsute jumping bean Mario was supposed to be a good guy or a bad guy. In Donkey Kong, Nintendo had cast the pudgy carpenter as the hero, and you'd had no problem strapping on the plus-size overalls to fight the stubborn simian of the title. But then the dude had turned into Simon Legree in Donkey Kong Junior, enslaving Kong and making a poor baby ape jump through fiery hoops in order to save his papa. Who the heck did this guy think he was?

Nintendo never let Mario be seen in such an unfortunate light again, and he quickly earned his place as the company's official mascot. The game that reversed the craftsman's career path? None other than the self-promoting Mario Bros., the best arcade title ever to take place in a sewer and the first game to portray Mario as the famous plumber that we know and love today.

And wouldn't you know it? Mario had a lookalike brother named Luigi. Taking a page from Joust, designer Shigeru Miyamoto created a perilous subterranean world that could simultaneously be patrolled by two squat-looking plumbers of Italian descent. In the far superior "doubles" mode (supporting actor Luigi, whose lime green overalls weren't as flattering as Mario's, never worked solo), you and a pal would flip over nasty creatures and then kick their stunned carcasses off the screen. The scuttle to earn points would inevitably create sibling rivalry, and you'd steal his "kill" by kicking away the critter that he'd just stunned. It was even more fun when you waged war and bumped your bro into one of those persistent fireballs, thereby scorching the pants off him. Does your mother know you act like this?

One quibble: Since the game is called Mario Bros., does it not follow that the title refers to the characters' last name, a la the Smothers Brothers? By that logic, our man would be called by the decidedly wussy moniker Mario Mario. Or is Luigi simply a silent and passive partner in the duo's plumbing business? Either way, it was the start of a beautiful relationship.





Game: Mario Bros.

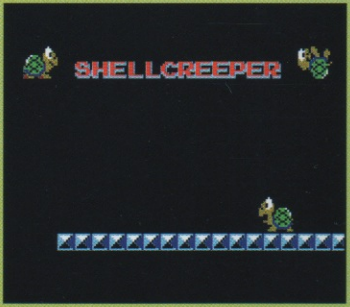
Year: 1983

Manufacturer: Nintendo

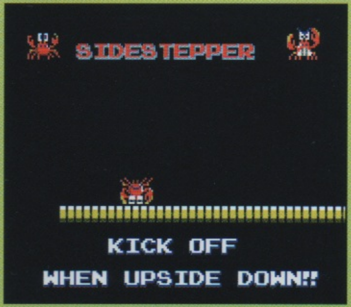
Controls: Two-direction joystick, jump button

Plot: As one of the overalls-wearing sibling plumbers Mario and Luigi, rid the sewer of nasty butt-biting critters and collect valuable gold coins

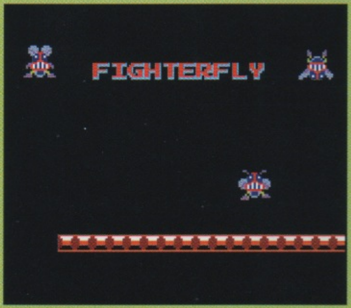
Meet Your Enemies



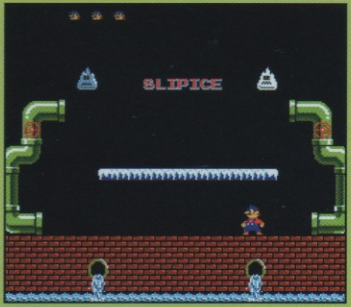
Shellcreepers: Cute turtles who hopped out of their shells after being flipped, revealing disturbing white undergarments



Sidesteppers: Grimacing crabs that required two bumps to flip over and got extremely displeased at repeated taunting



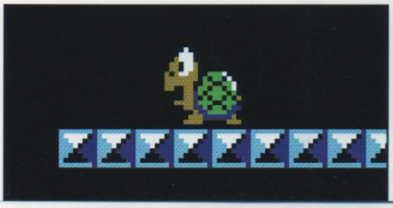
Fighterflies: Bouncing moths that took perfect timing to stun and took their sweet time fluttering around the board

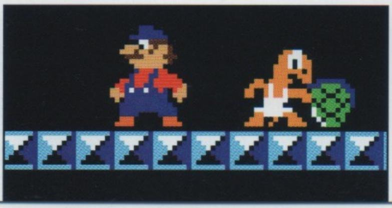


Slipice: Mounds of ice with the power to freeze a section of the floor and put Mario and Luigi in permafrost

Super Stars

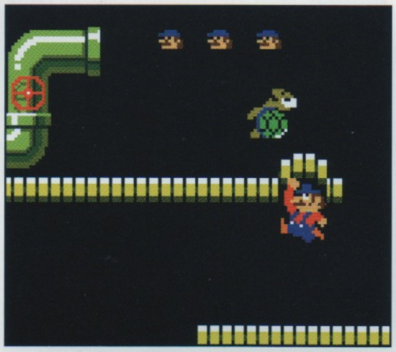
Besides their various video game team-ups, Mario and Luigi made the sewers safe again in the disappointing 1993 feature film *Super Mario Brothers.* English creampuff Bob Hoskins squeezed into Mario's overalls (although they were a drab-looking grey color), while spastic Latino actor John Leguizamo slipped on Luigi's sized-EEE shoes. Neither of them even remotely resembled the characters, and the movie generally disgraced Nintendo's fine name. Much more appealing was the 1989 Saturday morning children's series *The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!* which put professional wrestling curio Capt. Lou Albano in the title role. Super, indeed!





Oh Brother

Poor, poor Luigi. Not only was he forced to wear a flamboyant outfit, but he was doomed to forever live in media hog Mario's rotund shadow. While he appears in other entries in the series, Nintendo never gave him his own game. Where's Super Luigi World?



Spy Hunter

Game: Spy Hunter

Year: 1983

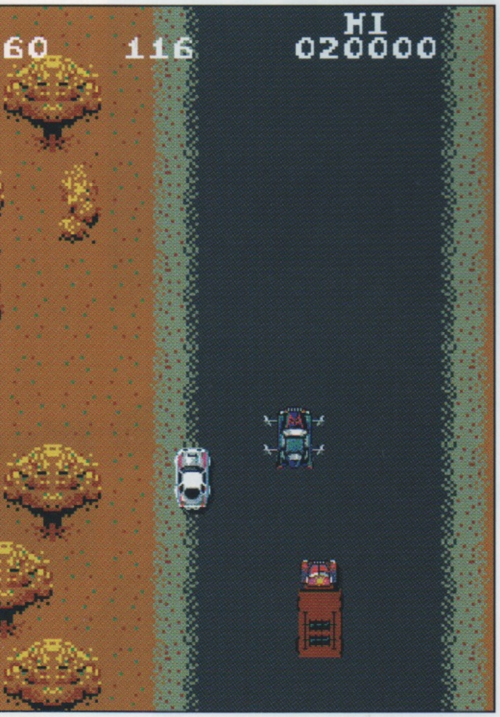
Manufacturer: Bally Midway

Controls: X-Y steering "yoke", gas pedal, gear shift, machine gun button, smokescreen button, oil slick button, missles button, weapons van summoning button

Plot: Swerve your James Bond–like stealth vehicle down a busy highway taking out villainous drivers with a mighty arsenal

The slick automobile that starred in Midway's 1983 road rage classic Spy Hunter was the Energizer Bunny of the arcade: It just kept going and going and going. Since there were never any individual stages or checkpoints, you could conceivably go on forever on a single tank of gas. It gave new meaning to the phrase fuel economy: At a quarter a fill-up, a gallon of unleaded cost just pennies.

Apart from its sensible gas-mileage statistic, the spy car had few conservative features. Your Z-80 (as it was identified in the illustration on the side of the machine) could be fitted with as many outlandish weapons as James Bond's Astin Martin, and at least one cool aspect of the game seemed to be taken straight out of the pages of the contemporary TV phenomenon *Knight Rider.* When you needed to upgrade your vehicle's hardware, you'd summon your roving weapons van just like Michael Knight flagging down his invisible boss Devon. The only things missing were the talking car and the unmatchable cheese of David Hasselhoff.

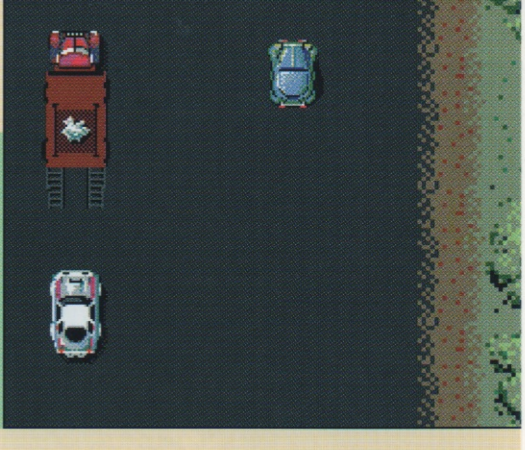


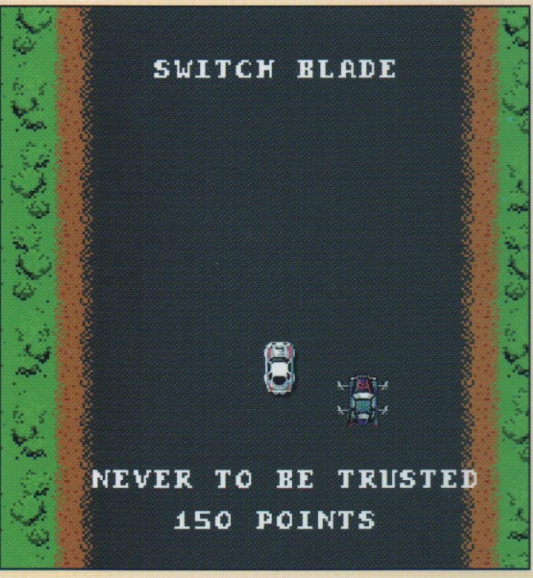
Once you accessed the van—by driving right up into the mofo while both vehicles were speeding down the highway—you now had an arsenal at your fingertips. With the rousing Peter Gunn theme song kickin' out the jams, you sped down the busy interstate and used your machine gun, missles, smokescreen or oil slick to pick off the cranky thugs who seemed to be everywhere. There was a steep learning curve for mastering the neat handlebar steering device, which also had four buttons corresponding to the different weapons you could deploy, but before long you could deftly swerve through civilian traffic and mow down any road hog that dared challenge you.

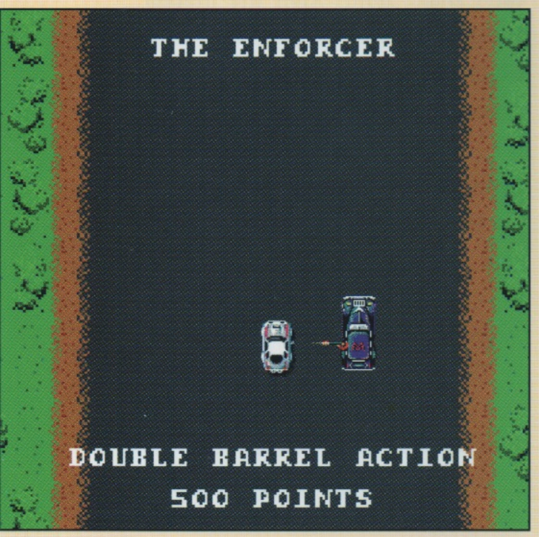
If you stayed alive long enough, the Z-80 would suddenly become amphibious and jet off onto a hostile river (after zooming through an abandoned marina). The Manimal-like transformation into cigarette speedboat didn't faze someone of your expert skill and you continued to bust out the whuppin' stick on the persistent enemy boats. Whether on land or at sea, you had become the ultimate secret agent, perhaps even worthy of being honored by the following goofy song: "Spy-hunting we will go, spy-hunting we will go, hi-ho the derry-o, spy-hunting we will go!" On second thought, let's just stick with the Peter Gunn theme.

Sky Dive

In 1987, Midway released the ill-advised Spy Hunter II, one of the worst sequels ever made. The Peter Gunn theme still blared away, but the gameplay had degenerated to an almost unrecognizable level. The difficult viewpoint lay somewhere slightly above and behind the Z-80—which now looked like a car befitting a clown instead of a spy hunter like yourself—and the screen had been split in half due to the unfortunate decision to accomodate a second simultaneous player. Two people could be disappointed at the same time!




SWITCH BLADE
NEVER TO BE TRUSTED
150 POINTS


THE ENFORCER
DOUBLE BARREL ACTION
500 POINTS

Meet Your Enemies

Switch Blade

This black hot rod possessed deadly tire-slashing weapons and were, as the attract mode predicted, "never to be trusted."

The Road Lord

The "bullet proof bully," which tried to bump you off the road, was impervious to machine gun fire. A well-placed oil slick did the trick.

The Enforcer

A limo that infrequently pulled up next to you, The Enforcer carried a guy in the back seat who whipped out a shotgun for some "double-barrel action."

The Mad Bomber

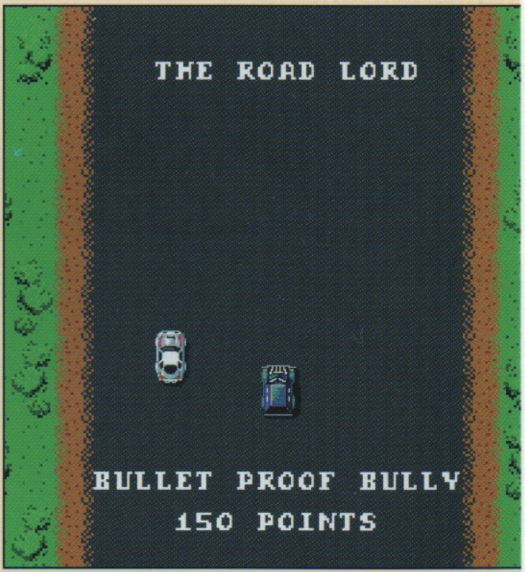
The "master of the sky" lobbed explosives in your path and caused all sorts of whirlybird mischief. Missile launch, go!

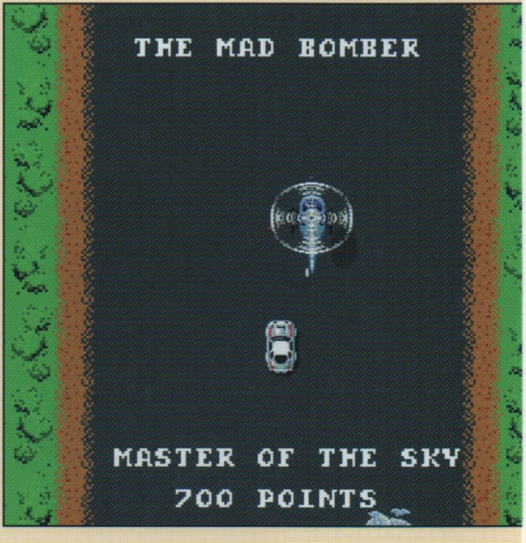
Barrel Dumper

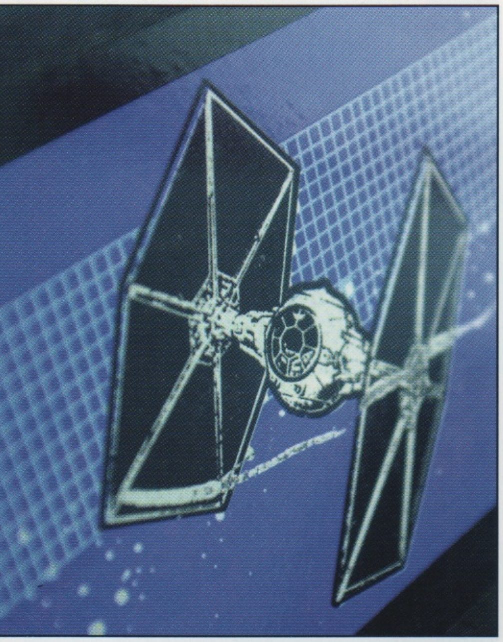
When the action turned waterborne, this annoying boat dumped crap in your way but was ripe for a swift missle to its tail.

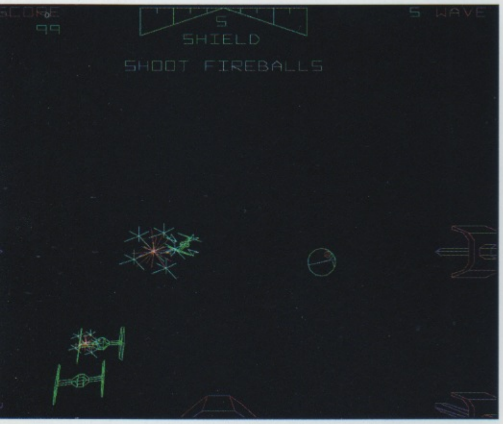
Doctor Torpedo

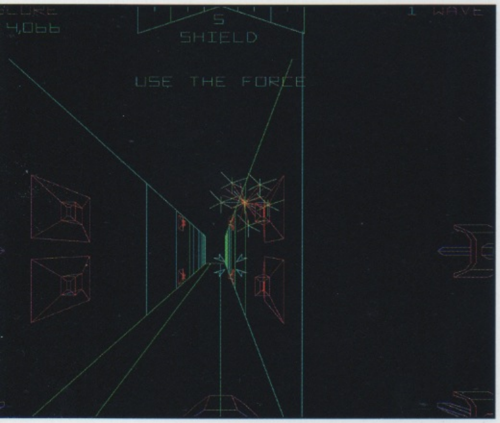
This massive barge snuck up behind you and tried to fire a missle at your hindquarters. Smoke screen him quick or you're sunk!


THE ROAD LORD
BULLET PROOF BULLY
150 POINTS


THE MAD BOMBER
MASTER OF THE SKY
700 POINTS







STAR WARS

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. . .

Okay, so it was only 1983 in your nearby, nearby arcade, but the video-game rendition of George Lucas's imaginative movie *Star Wars* was stuff of legend nonetheless. Featuring the sights, sounds and inherent awesomeness of the 1977 box-office smash, Atari's faithful adaptation plunked you in the cockpit of Luke Skywalker's X-wing fighter and let you give the middle finger to Darth Vader and company. Use the Force, indeed!

Released two months after *Return of the Jedi,* the first video game in the Star Wars universe was certainly long overdue. But the first time you laid eyes on the beautiful cabinet, adorned with images from the seminal flick, you knew that you had to insert a quarter, hear Mark Hamill say "Red Five standing by. . ." and kick Imperial ass. It was your destiny.

Once you adjusted to the state-of-the-art color vector graphics and got the hang of the funky, two-handed control mechanism (which neatly glided your firing cursor to any on-screen location you pointed), you felt as comfortable as Luke Skywalker cruising Beggar's Canyon back home. The basic strategy was to shoot like mad on the first stage, because the fighters were sticking to you like stink on a Tauntaun. Darth Vader kept saying things like "I have you now!" and "I'm on the leader!" which would cause Luke Skywalker to whine "I can't shake him!" After the fireball bombardment ceased, you were whisked toward the surface of some distant moon. Wait. . .that's no moon! It's the massive Empire-erected Death Star space station ("Look at the size of that thing!"), and you and your tweeting companion R2-D2 were, as Luke so eloquently put it, "going in."

The second test of your abilities was more quantitative: You had to destroy all laser towers on the Death Star surface for a whopping 50,000 point bonus. This was no small feat, considering that you had to weave your way through the towers themselves, often shooting and turning at the same time. The number of towers and fireballs increased as the game progressed so that you had to have Yoda-like concentration to receive the Jabba-sized bonus.

Even more free points were up for grabs in the tense trench scene. If you followed Obi-wan Kenobi's disembodied suggestion ("Use the Force, Luke!") and somehow navigated the tunnel without firing at the many fireballs that zoomed toward you, you'd get as much as 100,000 for the effort. It was here that you finally felt like a true Jedi knight; the "yoke" control, like Luke's trusty light saber, became an extension of your conscious self.

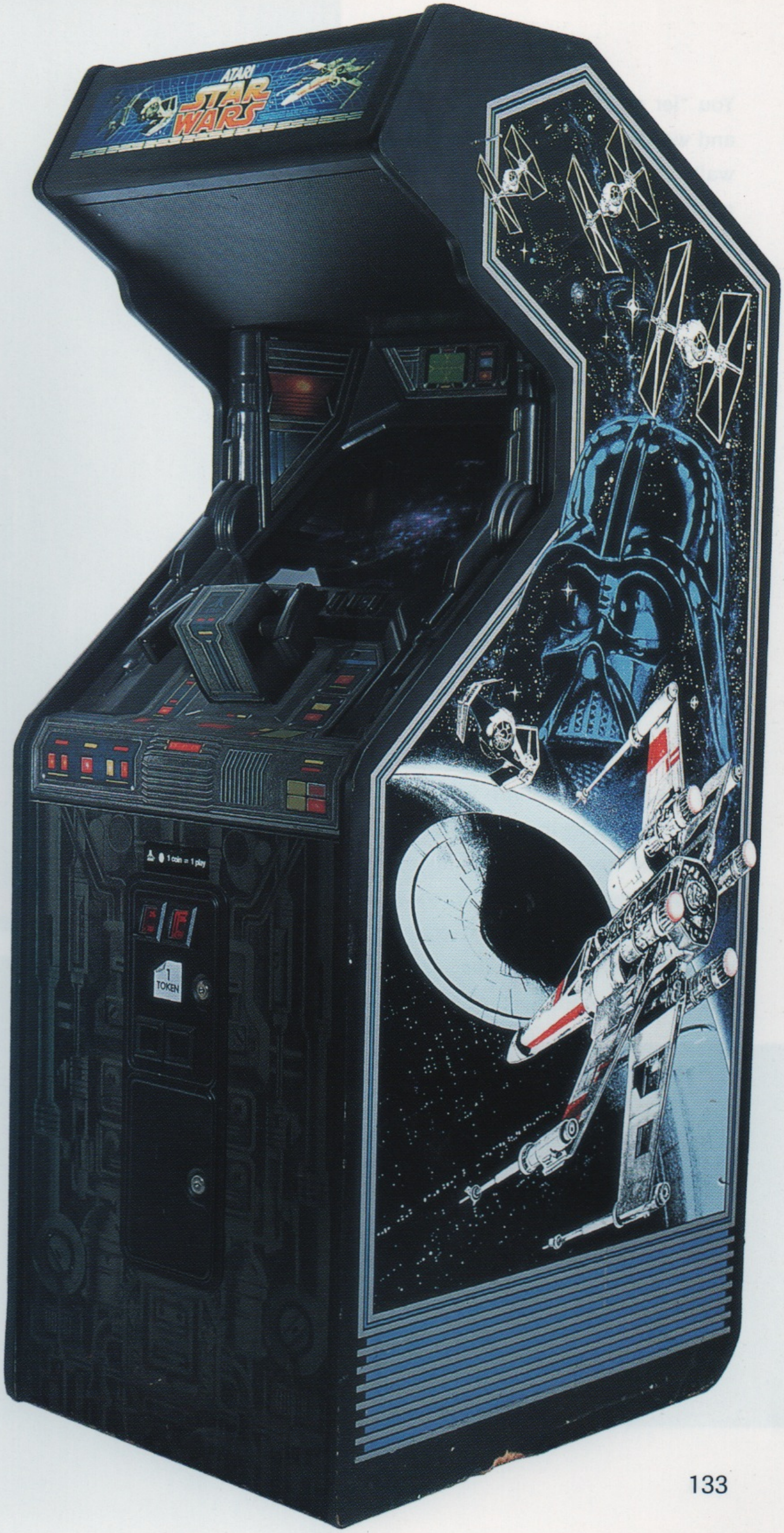
Game: Star Wars

Year: 1983

Manufacturer: Atari

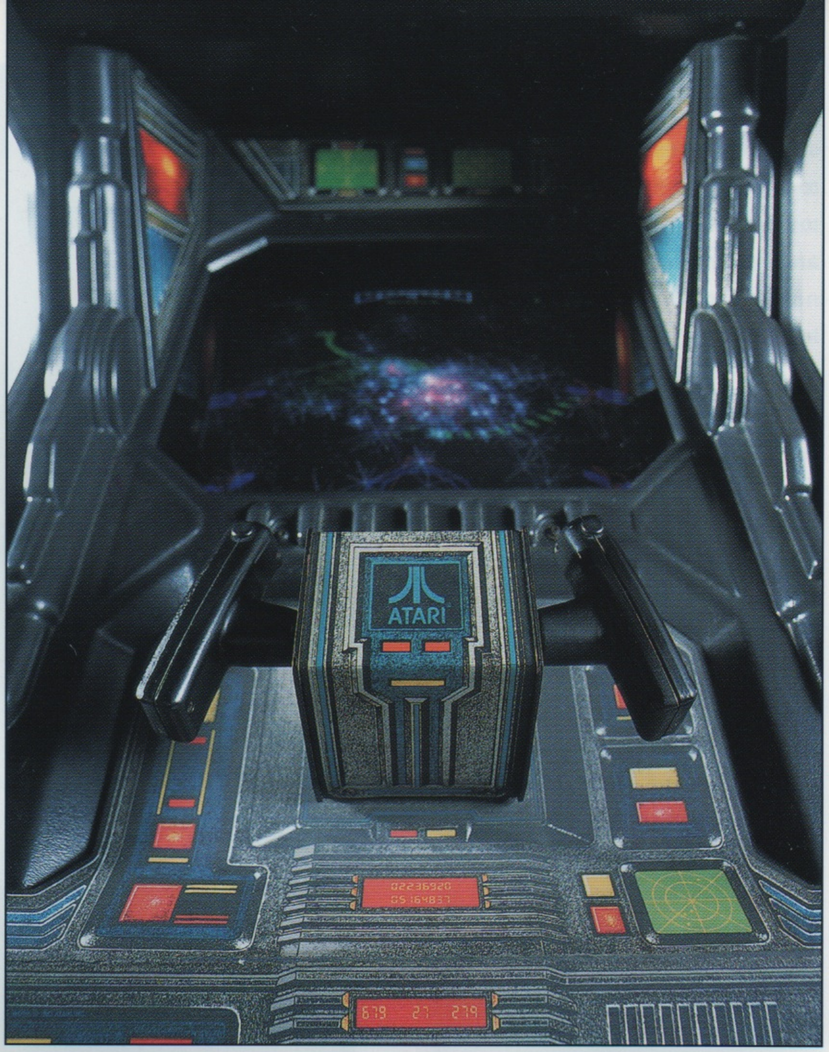
Controls: X-Y "yoke" handlebar, four fire buttons

Plot: You are the one and only Luke Skywalker, piloting an X-Wing past Imperial TIE fighters, laser towers, and heavy-breathing Darth Vader to blow up the Death Star



You "let go" (as Kenobi counseled) and wormed unscathed around catwalks and fireballs toward the end of the trench. Finally, you'd pinch off a well-placed torpedo at the naked exhaust port—a tiny thing no bigger than the womp rats you used to bullseye in your T-16 back home—and kerplooey! Bye bye, space station. "Yahoo!" cheered Han Solo. "You're all clear, kid!"

Then you'd step back and watch as the Death Star exploded in an almost blinding flash of blue and white light. If you performed this feat enough times in a row before losing all of your shields ("I've lost R2!"), you'd surely be appointed to Princess Leia's Rebel Guard—the game's glorified high-score list. As you fired in your initials, you'd also get serenaded by the peppy Cantina Band and hear your aged mentor say, "And remember: The Force will be with you. . .always." It was an Obi-wan-derful conclusion to the perfect video game.


ATARI
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05164837
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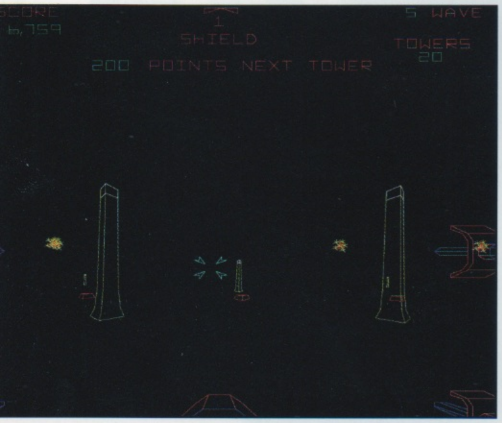
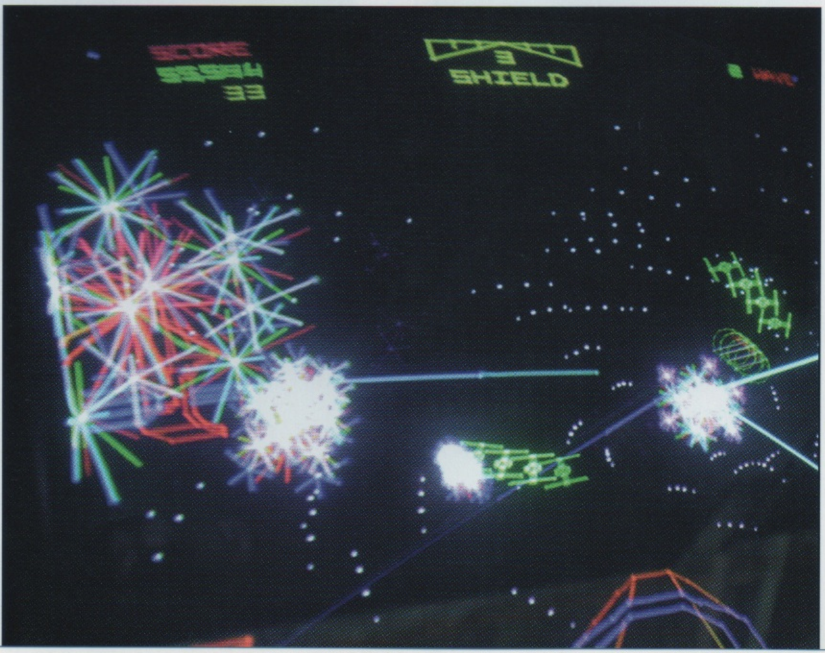
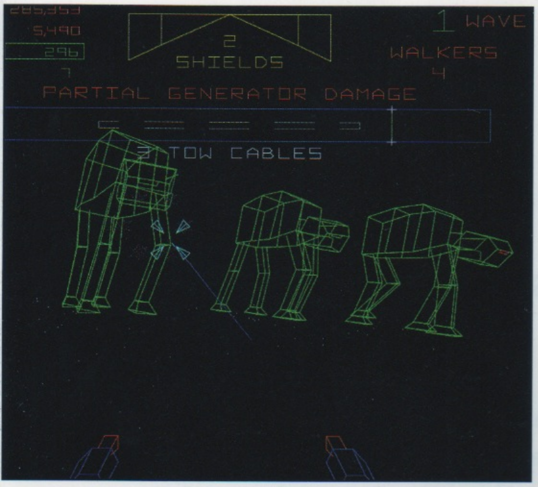
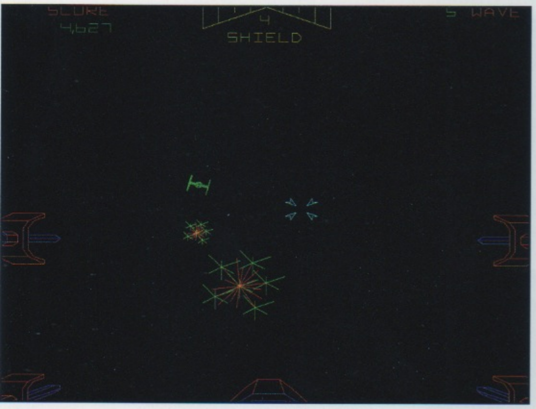
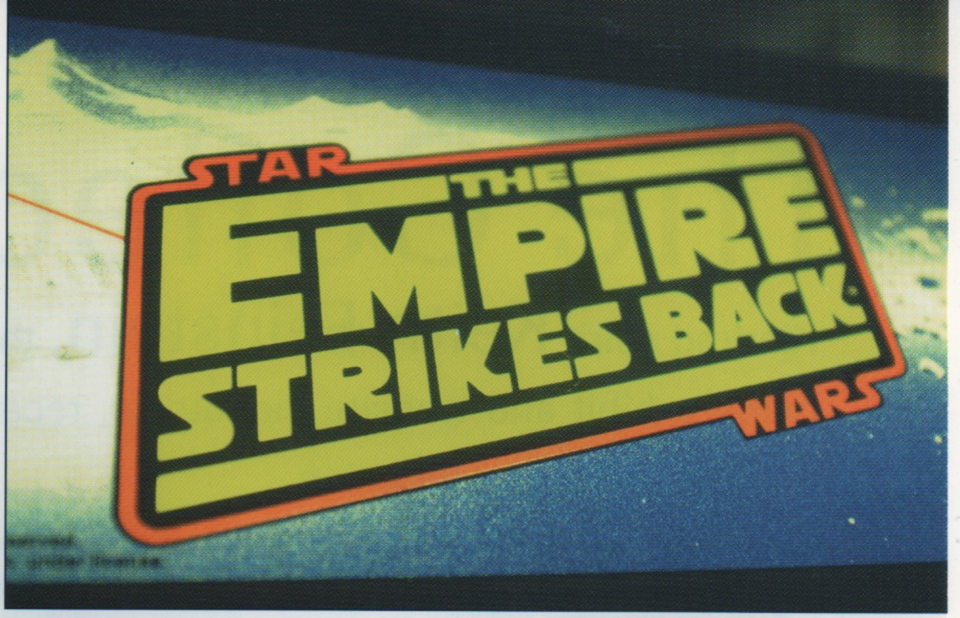

SCORE
6,759
1
SHIELD
5 WAVE
TOWERS
20
200 POINTS NEXT TOWER


SCORE
55594
33
3
SHIELD

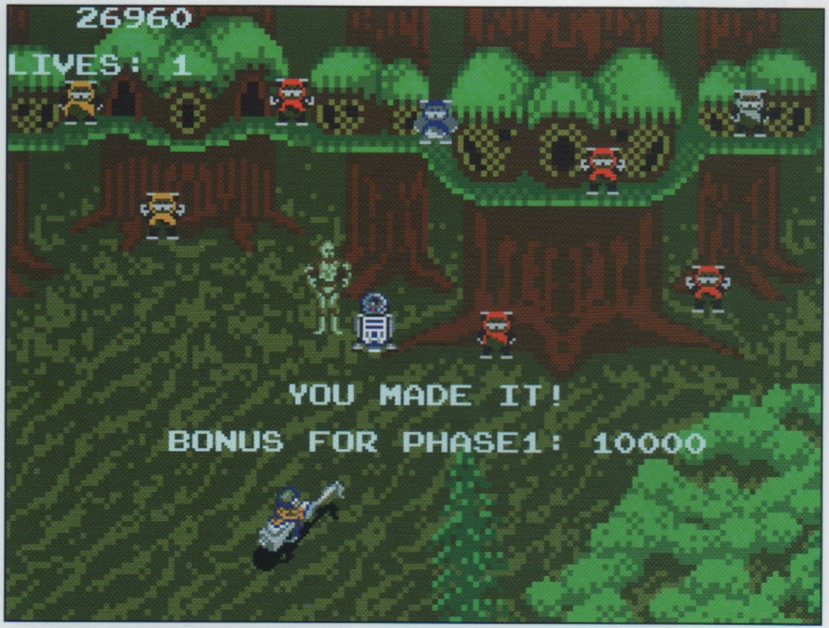

285,353
5,490
296
7
2
SHIELDS
1 WAVE
WALKERS
4
PARTIAL GENERATOR DAMAGE
3 TOW CABLES


SCORE
4,627
4
SHIELD
5 WAVE


STAR WARS
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

Atari Strikes Back

Atari quickly chased Star Wars with adaptations of the other two films in the trilogy. The Empire Strikes Back (1985), with its bold color vector graphics and X-Y "yoke", looked and played a lot like Star Wars, but simply wasn't as fun (although C3PO's friendly voice was added to the mix). And 1984's Return of the Jedi was as infuriating as those squirrely Ewoks: It used more traditional raster graphics and you kept switching personas, from Leia (zooming through the forest on the Endor moon) to Lando (piloting the Millennium Falcon through the reconstructed Death Star) and finally over to Chewbacca (controlling a two-legged scout walker vehicle).


26960
LIVES: 1
YOU MADE IT!
BONUS FOR PHASE1: 10000

Sit, Luke, Sit!

The cockpit, or sit-down, version of Star Wars didn't look like an X-Wing fighter, but it might as well have been one. With stereo sound and an actual roof surrounding you, you felt as though you were sitting right inside the X-Wing and that R2-D2 was right over your shoulder. The drawback: A Jedi upstart was always playing the game, and cockpit machines were notoriously difficult to "claim" by the generally accepted custom of putting a quarter up. When certain game hogs died, you sometimes had to tap on the glass to prevent them from sneaking in an illegal second game. Darn nerfherders!

The Collector

Kindred spirit Keith Feinstein, the curator of the video-game exhibit and website Videotopia, recalls the highs and lows of video-game preservation

You wish you knew Keith Feinstein. If you did—and you can tell your Pac-Man from your Pokémon—the New Jerseyan might invite you to tour the warehouse where he stores the 400-plus classic video games that he uses to power Videotopia, the sprawling retrospective exhibit that has appeared in museums around the country since 1996. At the tender age of 25, Feinstein dropped out of chiropractic school to start the back-breaking work of video-game collection and preservation, an undervalued endeavor that Arcade Fever wholeheartedly supports. Sidestepping our request for a free Star Wars machine, he granted us a token interview instead.

Arcade Fever: How many games do you currently own?

Keith Feinstein: Over 900. I don't even know the exact count anymore.

AF: Wow. How many of those are doubles?

KF: We try to get five or six of every game because we're not doing this to have our favorite game in our basement. I obviously think that's the greatest thing for people to love these things and take them home and take care of them. But if it goes into somebody's collection, it sits in their basement and nobody will ever see it. Now everybody gets to see it.

AF: How many games is too many?

KF: Nine hundred's too many. But that doesn't mean that in three years it's not going to be like 1,500.

AF: Is there a Holy Grail of collecting?

KF: No. I've got it all. I mean, there are games that I still want to get for the exhibit, but they are games that are not hard to find. I went after the stuff that was really important to tell the story of the history of video games, and I went after the stuff that was really important to preserve. Now I'm just trying to fill in everything. I want to get every Atari game, and that sort of stuff.

AF: When did you get the idea for this?

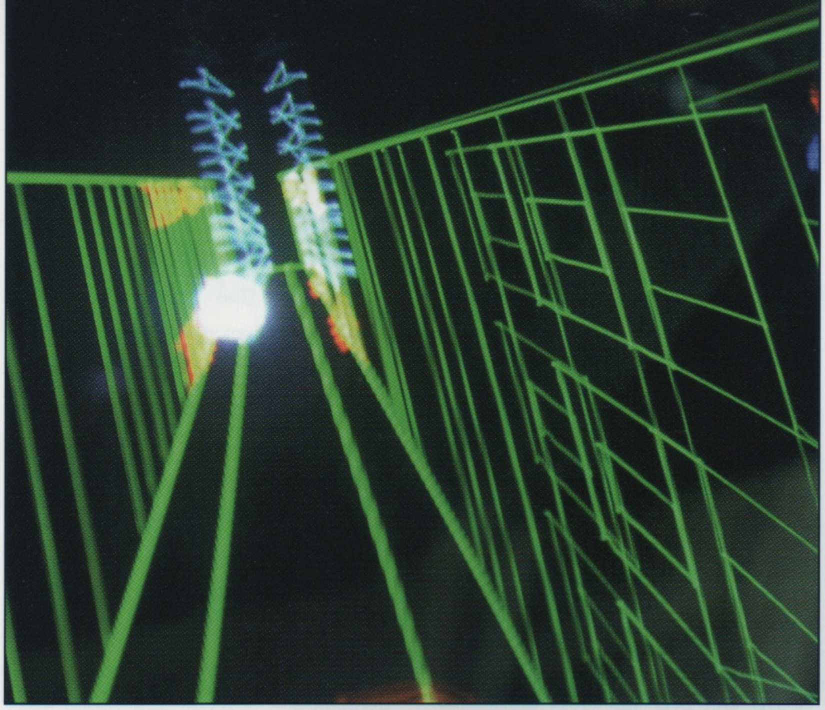
KF: Everybody was making all this fuss about how films were not preserved and they're spending millions of dollars trying to turn this rotting celluloid back into viewable print, and the reason for that was that film was not respected as an art form for almost 40 years from its inception. And I said, there's gonna come a day when people my age are in their 40s and 50s where they're gonna go, "Where are these things?" And they're not going to anywhere, unless somebody does something about it. And that was the germ of it.

AF: What was the first arcade game you bought?

KF: It was a Star Wars, in 1989. And I put it in my dorm room and it paid for itself and paid for pizza and beer for the whole year. We always left our door open, and you'd come back and people would be playing it. At the end of the week you'd have, like $15 bucks. It was cool.

AF: How far have you gone to find the games?

KF: We've gone everywhere. We've imported them from other countries. I've gotten stuff from the vacation islands, like Bermuda and the Bahamas. I brought a Computer Space in from backwoods Canada. You have to get lucky sometimes. I started this when nobody was doing this, and when there was no Internet for it. You had to just start calling people and talking to people.



AF: What's one of the best things you've found?

KF: It was the Star Trek prototype, in the crate. It had been built for the trade show in 1983. It had only been used for three days. It's a total prototype. The wiring is incomplete, and there's no power switch. It has a little sticker on it that says, "Game set for free play." I was so psyched to have that. It had been sitting in this warehouse since 1983.

AF: Have you ever found anything really disgusting in a game?

KF: We bought a game recently and we opened it and there's a rat's nest. We've found games with hornet's nests in there. And then just in general there's usually just a cake of dust. Except it's not dust anymore. It's turned into legitimate dirt. It's earth now.

AF: What's the worst thing that's happened?

KF: I got blown across a warehouse one time. I was trying to dick around inside an Atari Football and someone had disconnected one of the safety interlocks. I didn't pay enough attention and I put my hand in there and I touched something and it literally shot me five feet back onto my ass. I've got burns on the knuckles and fingers of my hands from stuff like that.

AF: Do you have any horror stories about collecting?

KF: One of the most beautiful games that was ever made was the Discs of Tron environmental cabinet, which was this monster thing that you'd stand inside. Just everything about that game is gorgeous. The whole inside is lit with strobes and pulsing black lights, and the artwork on the sides of it is gorgeous. It's really one of the most beautiful games ever made. And we got a call from this dude we knew: "We got it, it's brand new and it was never taken out of the box." So I paid well over a grand for this thing, and I'm like, "Let's not take it out of the box. Let's wait until we get back to the warehouse and let's film everything!" Because when do you get the opportunity to do this? This was a game from the Golden Age, and a Tron game, you know? When the shippers moved the exhibit from Tampa to Dallas, the one machine they dropped was this. Off the truck, smashed, destroyed. The cabinet cracked, the glass broke.

AF: What did you do when you found out?

KF: I cried. I very nearly did. I feel like we all lost something. We lost the opportunity to see that thing uncrated. We lost the opportunity to have a game that was brand new from 1983. An important game.

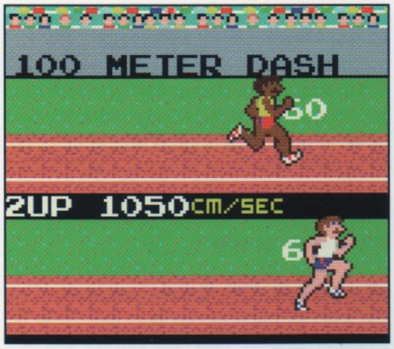
AF: It sort of like someone who ripped up a Mickey Mantle card or something.

KF: Exactly. And a Mickey Mantle rookie card is a heck of a lot easier to keep and keep care of than a 500 pound, six-foot tall, six-feet long, three-feet wide video game like Discs of Tron.

AF: How obsessed have you gotten in searching for these games?

KF: One time a friend called and said, "This guy's got all these games from like '75 to '85 sitting in his barn." And I call this guy and he's just this real backwoods redneck. So we drive out—it was in Alabama—and there's a full-blown Ku Klux Klan rally going on. I mean, hoods and a big cross and everything. And I'm Jewish. So this guy comes and says, "Are you the guys about the video games? They're all in that barn over there, go take a look! And when you're done, you might want to come back and join us. There's a lot of good things being said back here!" And I'm like, "Yeah, we might do that." This is how insane I am! I'm a Jewish guy and there's a Klan rally with at least 50 people, and I go, "Okay, no problem!" Then I proceed to spend an hour and a half in a barn right on this property. Can you believe this? What an idiot I was! The worst thing is that I got nothing from there.

DISCS OF TRON



Game: Track and Field

Year: 1983

Manufacturer: Konami

Controls: Two run buttons, jump/throw button

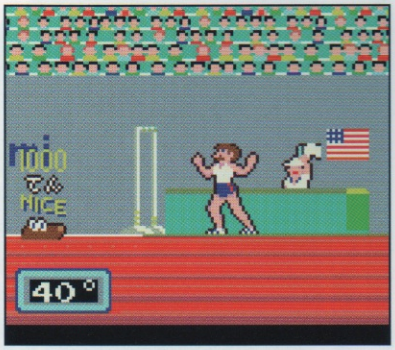
Plot: Breeze through six events at the Konami Olympics and take home the gold medal

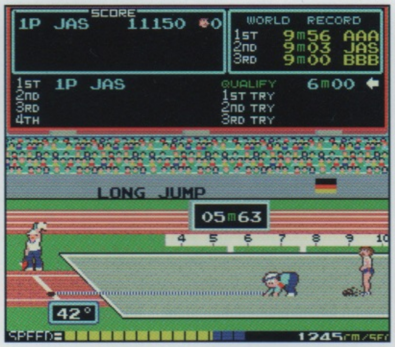
Track and Field

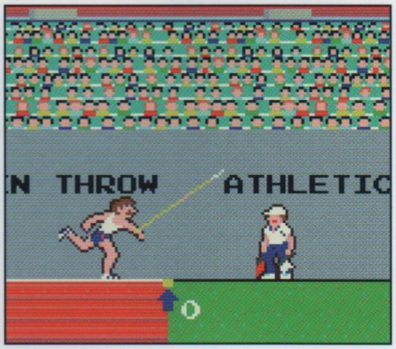
True or false: When Carl Lewis ran the 100 meters in 9.93 seconds at the 1984 Olympics, he set a world's record for the fastest time in the event. False! The reason: You and thousands of other people had already been clocked running the dash in under eight seconds. The fact that yours was done virtually, on Konami's 1983 smash Track and Field, only mattered to official record keepers. But you knew.

The first true multisport title, Track and Field allowed you and up to three friends to compete in six events: the 100 meters, the long jump, the javelin throw, the 110 meter hurdles, the hammer throw and the high jump. You were up for a medal in some cockeyed Olympic competition (the sextathalon?), and nothing less than gold would do.

To achieve this goal, you first needed to master the awkward "run" buttons. Each time you pressed them, your guy would inch forward; the quicker you hit them, the faster your man would go. At first you'd just bang alternately on the buttons—*right-left-right-left-right-left*—and make an unholy racket that everybody in the arcade could head. Soon you adopted one of three more useful techniques: 1) using a Joustian "flap" on each button with two fingers, hopefully doubling your speed; 2) deftly dropping three fingers from each hand on one or both buttons, which sounded vaguely like a dealer shuffling a deck of cards; and 3)

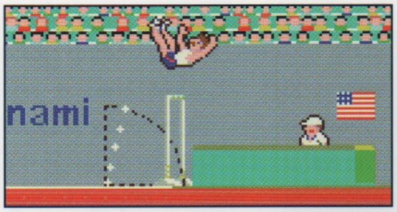






Gift Rapping

There are 1000-point bonuses hidden within five of the six events. On both of the dashes, a stocky dude in a red hat (actually the lead character from Konami's 1982 game Tutankham) would award you a key if you and your opponent finished in a dead heat. In the long jump, three qualifying leaps of the same distance also caused the Tutankham guy to materialize. A sky-high javelin toss will hit an unlucky bird. Squawk! And in the high jump, an ugly-looking rodent will turn up and say "Nice!" if you make it over the qualifying height after botching your first two attempts. The bonus on the hammer throw is as mythical as the Lost City of Atlantis. Rumor has it that you can hit an object that looks a lot like the jet from Konami's Time Pilot, but the world may never know.

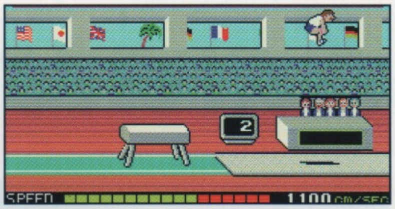


placing a pen or pencil precariously between your fingers and making it hit the buttons for you. People who employed that last gimmick were weirdos and nerds and were to be avoided at all costs.

After the straightforward 100 meters—in which you rocketed toward the finish line like a sprinter juiced up on steroids—you bolted down a run-up area and frantically smacked the "jump/throw" button to launch yourself or a javelin great distances. This three-button procedure was initially difficult to pull off, frequently resulting in a foot fault that spurred the glib emcee to say "Foul." If you did this three times in a row or couldn't muster the qualifying distance, your game would be over and your guy would scratch the back of his head dejectedly as if itching dandruff. More likely, though, you managed to qualify, and a dorky sounding woman would excitedly read the measuring tape: "The distance: Eight point zero zero meters!"

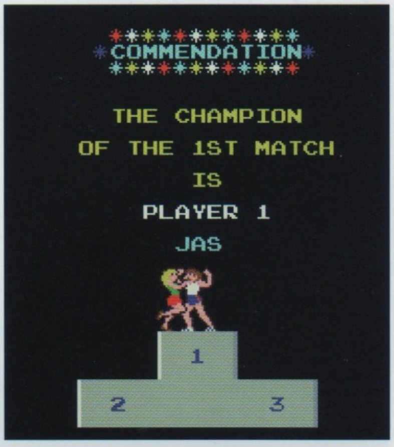
Being proficient at the final three events required Olympian skill. The 110 meter hurdles caused great problems because you'd have to run a little, hit the jump button, then run a little more, and jump again—and so on, in order to clear ten high hurdles. If you tripped, your guy's eyes would bulge out and he'd sprawl over the track, losing precious seconds. The hammer throw was a different animal. You didn't even need to work the "run" buttons, but instead needed to time your throw perfectly as your man spun around and around. Usually you'd just chuck the damn thing into the cheap seats. Lastly came the high jump, the most difficult event in which to excel, if not to qualify. Sadly, it was also the most boring.

If you made it through all six events in a single player game, you'd be crowned the top medalist, be serenaded by the rousing theme to *Chariots of Fire* and get to have a hot babe hanging all over you. When you played against one or more opponents, you'd be assigned a place on the podium according to your scores. You didn't come all this way for the silver.



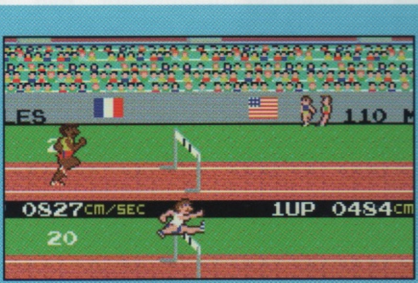
Olympic Gold

Konami added a little more oomph to Hyper Sports, released just in time for the 1984 Olympics. The difficult sequel featured seven entirely new sporting events: 100 meter freestyle swimming, skeet shooting, gymnastic vaulting, archery, triple jump, weightlifting and pole vault. Where was the 1600 meter walk?



COMMENDATION

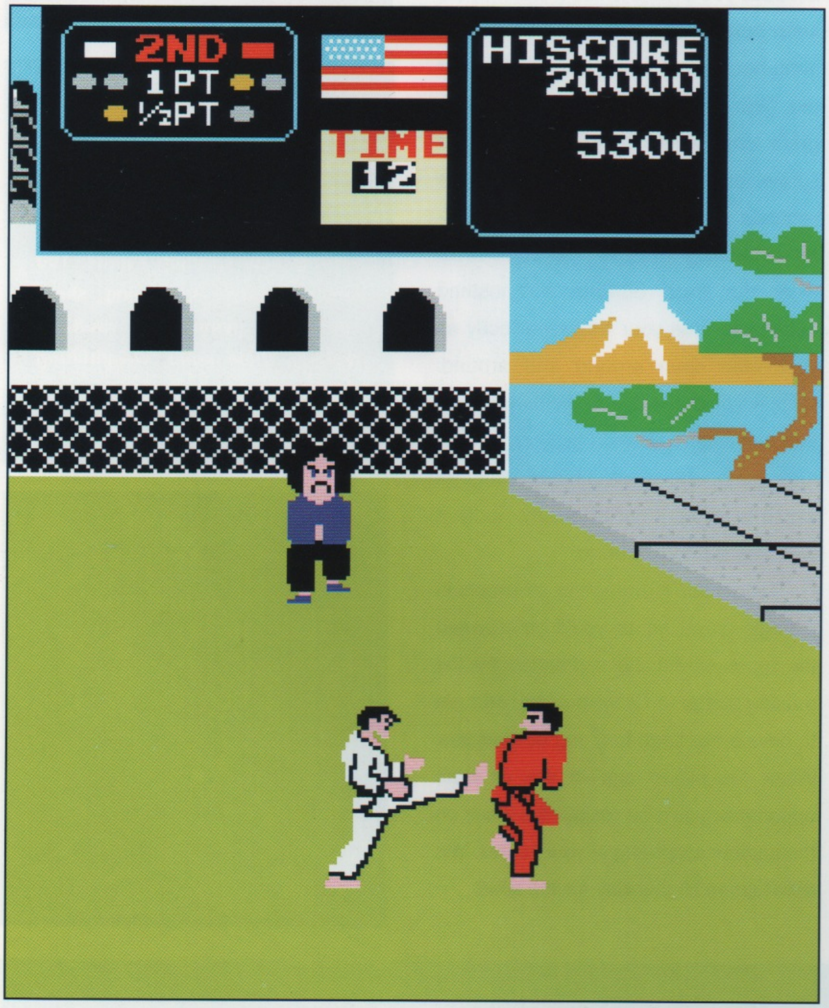
THE CHAMPION
OF THE 1ST MATCH
IS
PLAYER 1
JAS



Dirty Meter Dash

There was one notorious cheat for a super high score. On the hurdles, one player would run a fair race and cross the line in a perfectly legal qualifying time. But the other weasel would hang back at the starting line and when the clock approached 100 seconds, the cheater would take off down the track and join the other guy at the finish line. Because the timer rolled over at 100, a sneaky player could end the race in one measly second, thereby adding thousands of points to his score. It was worse than anything Ben Johnson ever did.

Karate Champ



Despite the crippling video game crash of 1984, Karate Champ came out at just the right time. A few months earlier, the insanely popular *The Karate Kid* had transformed the nation into a mass of Miyagi-loving, "wax-on, wax-off" quoting zombies, and Data East's unique hand-to-hand fighting game basically let you strap on Daniel-san's keen white karate duds. You didn't even have to look like Tiger Beat pinup Ralph Macchio to get the gig.

Karate Champ first debuted as a one-player game where you took on a computer-controlled opponent in a series of "dans," or tournaments. Your goal was to advance from the local training dojo to the national tournament, and each competition was judged by a very vocal official that resembled the movie critic Gene Shalit. Only by relentlessly experimenting with the joysticks were you able to pull off the important "full point" moves, such as the back roundhouse and the foot sweep. In fact, the entire game played out like the final showdown scene in *The Karate Kid*, except without that annoying loudmouth bad guy yelling "Get him a body bag!"

1984

In headlines: Reagan gives Walter Mondale an election wedgie; Supreme Court liberates airwaves with landmark VCR ruling

At theaters: Arnold Schwarzenegger says "I'll be back"; Nerds! Nerds! Nerds!; lame back-spinning in *Breakin' 2: Electric Boogaloo*

On TV: Hey, hey, hey—it's *The Cosby Show;* Florida actually looks cool in *Miami Vice*

In music: The Boss reminds world he was *Born in the U.S.A.;* Madonna's *Like a Virgin* touches for first time; U2 lights *Unforgettable Fire*

The second version—and the one that most people remember—was the much improved "player versus player" Karate Champ, which was the first game to allow you to cram your fist into your best friend's virtual solar plexus. The prototype for the endless stream of tournament fighting games that came later, starting with 1991's Street Fighter II, the two-player installment of Karate Champ eschewed blood and guts for some good, clean ass-whupping fun. To misquote the theme to *The Karate Kid Part II,* you were a man who would fight for the honor of a menagerie of beautiful damsels, and if you won a particular dan you'd get a peck on the cheek and a chance to pick up bonus points by showing off what you'd learned. Like Peter Cetera said, you did it all for the glory of love.

It's tough to compare the simplistic, almost gentlemanly face-offs of Karate Champ with the modern-day massacres of Mortal Kombat and Soul Calibur. But Data East's genre-busting release revealed to the faltering industry that kids loved to beat the crap out of each other without actually feeling the pain themselves. To the next generation of Karate Kids went the spoils.

Game: Karate Champ

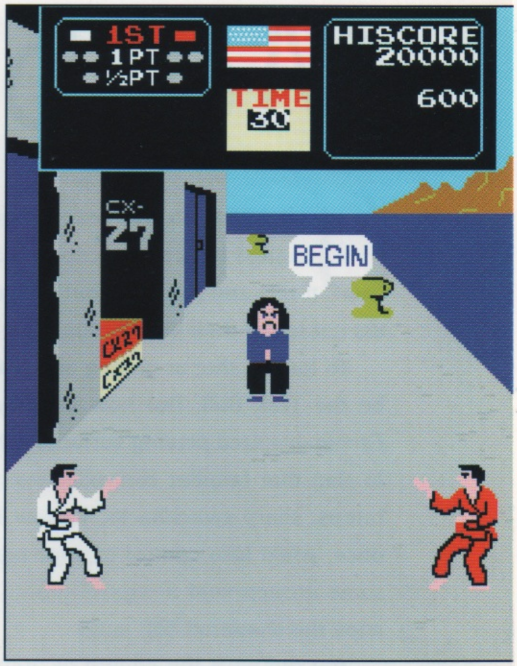
Year: 1984

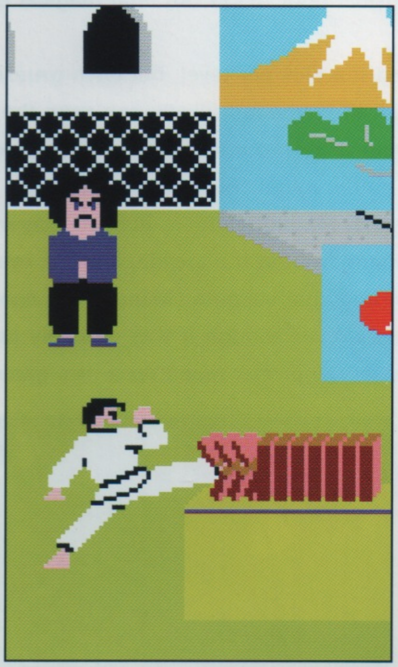
Manufacturer: Data East

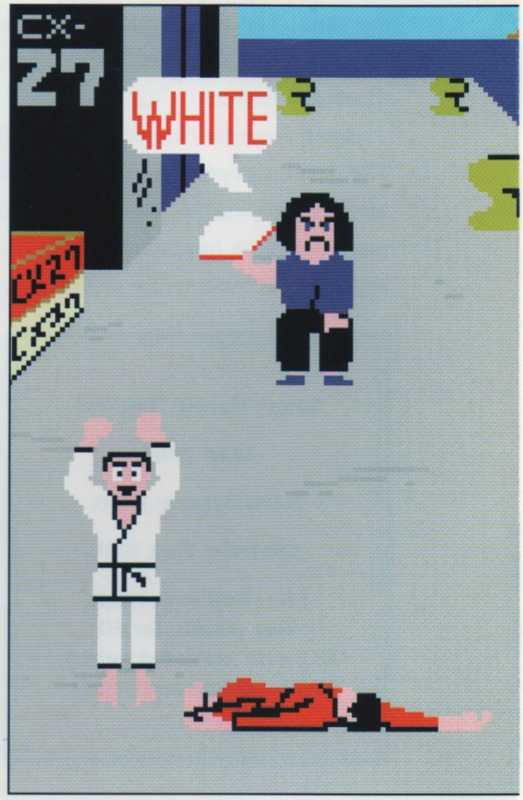
Controls: Two four-direction joysticks

Plot: With your knowledge of joystick martial arts, prove to your opponent that your kung fu's the best

Major milestone: First one-on-one, hand-to-hand fighting game







Macchio Man

Between tournaments, the winning player was challenged to evade quick-moving flowerpots, smack charging bulls in the kisser, chop piles of stubborn wooden blocks and other tests of joystick prowess. Show me "Paint the fence."

Marble Madness

Until 1984, no one really knew how difficult life could be for a marble. Astute arcade-goers were forced to change their preconceptions about the age-old children's tchotchke that year when they got to experience the thrills and spills of Atari's bizarre and wonderful Marble Madness. As the game's rotund blue protagonist, players got to roll their way through one of the most formidible tests of dexterity ever conceived for release in the arcade.

To have a shot at getting any reasonable distance into the game, you had to forget about arms and legs and just be the Trak Ball. But how could you be the ball when the action took place on those three-dimensional, M.C. Escher–inspired playing surfaces, which had a tendency to confound even the most nimble-handed hot shot? You had to slap that familiar controller every which way to safely escort your blue friend past an endless parade of steep ramps, sharp switchbacks, narrow ledges, acid pools and other creepy killers before the clock ran out. More than once, you'd lose control of your marble and it would hurtle over the edge of a precipice, either disappearing into some unseen void or crashing onto a visible floor below. An anal magical broom would then appear and tastefully wipe the shattered ball away.

You did have the benefit of unlimited marbles per level, but each gruesome death sapped precious seconds off the clock. The more your time decreased, the more spastically you spun the Trak Ball to get down to the goal. Your balance was thrown off, and at times your teetering marble might have resembled a circus unicyclist attempting to traverse a highwire. And that was only on the initial "Beginner" course.

Apart from its challenging playing style, Marble Madness hooked players with technological bells and whistles. The graphics definitely made the game stand out at the arcade, and the eye candy included such oddities as drawbridges with visible hydraulics systems, and cool vacuum cleaners that snarfed you all gone. Another far-reaching feature was its trance-inducing soundtrack, even though it was probably just some stoner going gonzo on a Casio keyboard. Somehow the mellow sounds set the proper mood for a nice game of marbles.

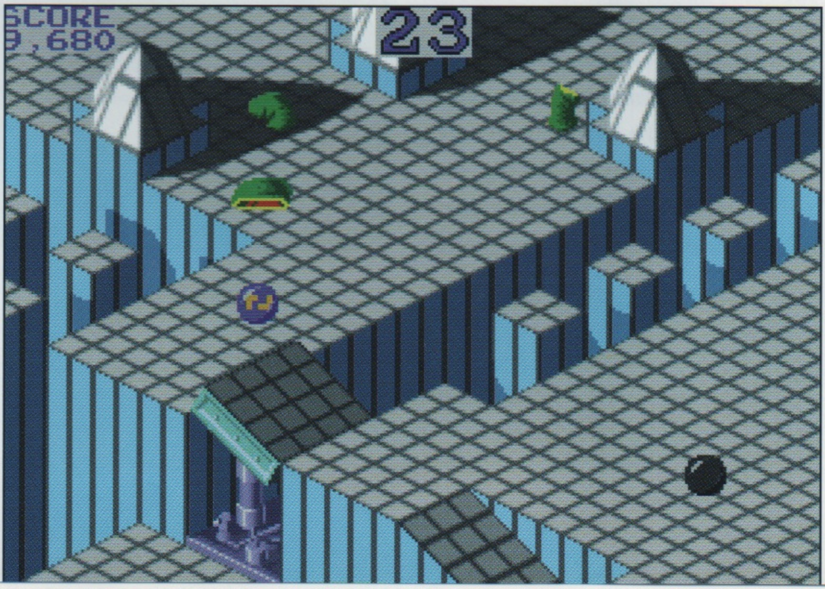
Game: Marble Madness

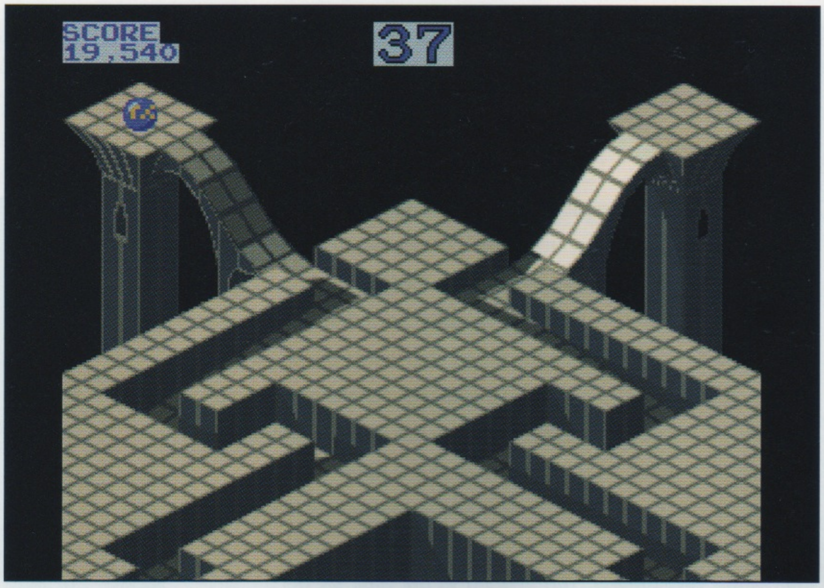
Year: 1984

Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Trak Ball

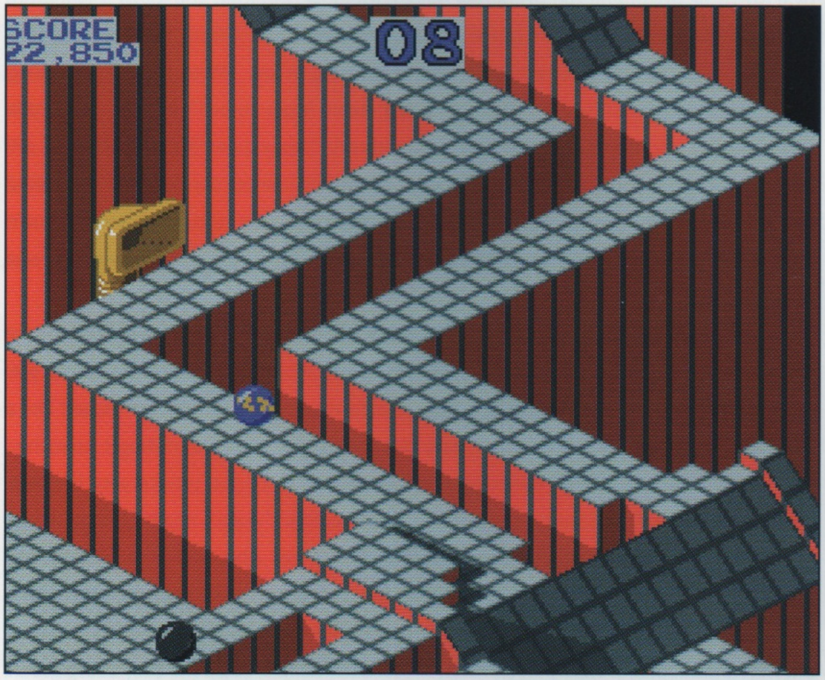
Plot: Roll your crazy blue marble for all its worth around a quirky, booby-trapped structure





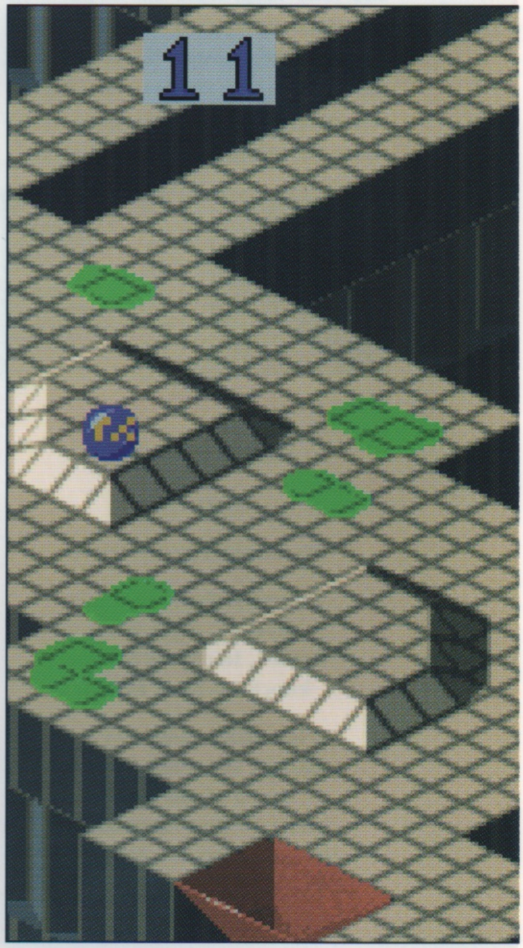
Airborne

In the practice round, you could earn up to 6,000 bonus points by hopping over a chasm to the areas where the numbers 3, 4, 5 and 6 were painted on the ground. It was like catching air in a half-pipe, dude!

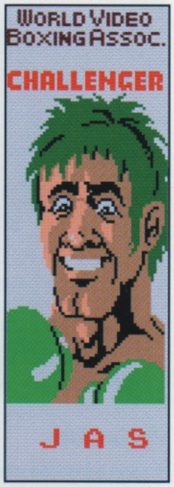


Marble Boy

Marble Madness was the brainchild of manchild Mark Cerny, who joined Atari in 1984 at the tender age of 17. He went on to establish Cerny Games, which now does a brisk business with Sega after creating the popular character Crash Bandicoot.



Punch-Out!!



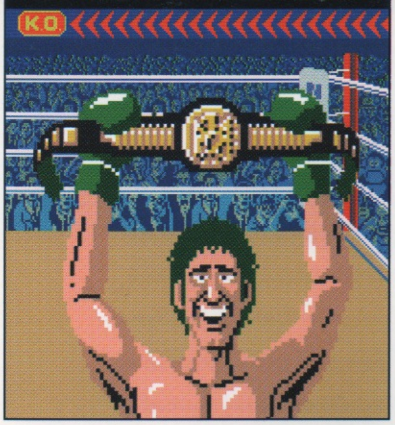
Introducing, in the right corner. . .some green boxer dude that you can actually see through! Of course, the hero from Nintendo's nicely-punctuated 1984 boxing classic Punch-Out!! needs no introduction. As strange as it felt at first, you repeatedly forked over the entry fee to step inside the square circle as that spinach-haired, grid-skinned "challenger" simply because you loved bashing the bejeezus out of those extras from *Rocky III.* Eye of the tiger, chump! Eye of the tiger!

Once you got the hang of the controls—especially maneuvering your guard to block your opponents' punches—the game got interesting very quickly. You needed to get past six personality-deprived goons in order to become champion of the (W.V.B.A.) World Video Boxing Association, and about the only thing you had going for you was a fairly handsome mug. But then there was your wicked right hook and uppercut. Whenever you did sufficient damage to your rival, you'd be able to hit the oversized "knockout blow" plunger. You knew this feature was available to you when the game's excited commentator yelled "Put him away!"

And the pesky announcer always had something to say. When you were socking your opponent about his midsection, you'd hear "Body blow!" In fact, a sample sequence of punches might have been called thusly: "Body blow! Body blow! Left! Left! Right hook! Right hook! Uppercut!" If your opponent tasted canvas, the voice said "He's down for the count!" When you moved on to the next ranked opponent, you'd hear "Good fighting! He's an up-and-coming boxer!" At least he knew what he was talking about.

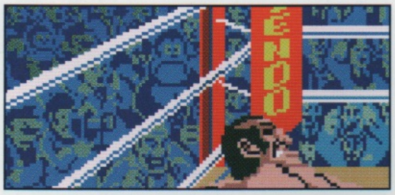
Once you'd beaten all six ranked opponents, you became the grand poobah of the W.V.B.A. and you took on all comers, who just so happened to be the same mooks you just clobbered. The difference between the rounds was that you no longer looked like a miniature Incredible Hulk. Your hair was still green, but your see-through torso had turned yellow, which doesn't seem fair considering that you'd just proven your bravado.

No matter how proficient a pugilist you became, there wasn't much chance of you retiring undefeated. And that's where Punch-Out!! got you: After one of the jerks finally knocked you out, he'd approach the screen, get all big-eyed and start gloating with a well-placed "ho-ho-ho!" He was calling you out, and you had no choice but to throw another quarter in and wipe that smirk off his face the next time. It's not easy being green.



Mario World

If you look closely on the rightmost and leftmost sides of the screen, popular Nintendo characters are occupying ringside seats. Mario scalped a great space two rows deep, while his brother Luigi got stuck sitting next to Donkey Kong Junior a little further back. The most visible, though, is Donkey Kong; the grimacing gigantor actually seems to be rooting against you. What an asswipe!



Game: Punch-Out!!

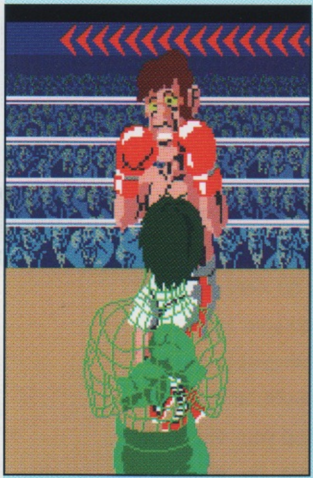
Year: 1984

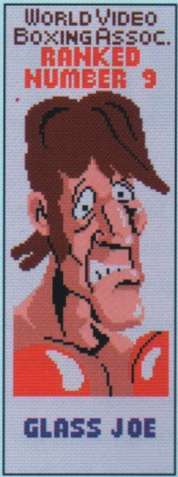
Manufacturer: Nintendo

Controls: Four-direction joystick, right blow button, left blow button, knockout blow button

Plot: Work your way up through the goon-infested ranks of the World Video Boxing Association by mastering the art of the "body blow!" and "uppercut!"

Meet Your Opponents



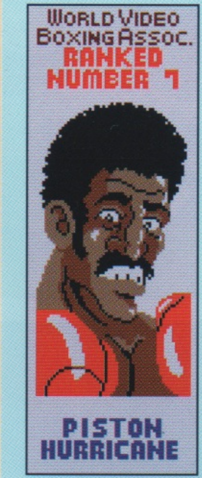

WORLD VIDEO
BOXING ASSOC.
RANKED
NUMBER 9
GLASS JOE

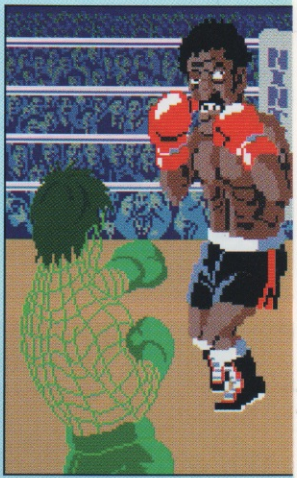
Glass Joe

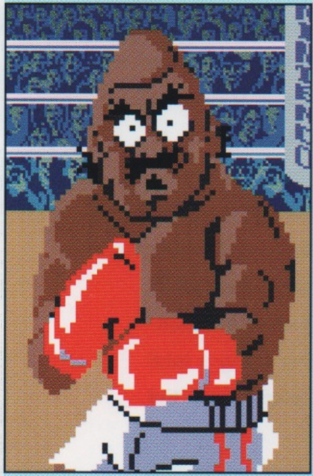
This long-faced, 112-pound weakling from the not-so-mean streets of Paris, France, wilted faster than a bon bon on the Riviera. Hang 'em up if you can't turn Glass Joe into Canvas Joe in less than a minute.

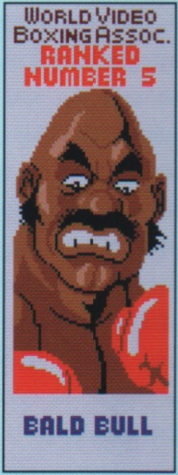
Piston Hurricane

He hailed from Cuba, which begins to explain why his gut was as soft as a plate of beans and rice. A few well-placed pops to his midriff and the sad sack commie Piston Hurricane, your second victim, crumbled like an old cigar.


WORLD VIDEO
BOXING ASSOC.
RANKED
NUMBER 7
PISTON
HURRICANE





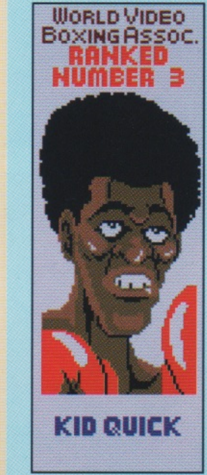

WORLD VIDEO
BOXING ASSOC.
RANKED
NUMBER 5
BALD BULL

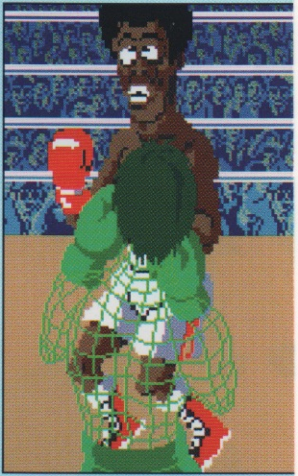
Bald Bull

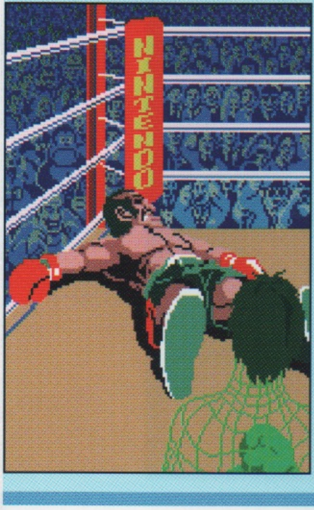
So named because of his hairless cranium and his resemblance to *el toro loco,* Istanbul native Bald Bull, weighing in at 298 solid pounds, was your first real threat. You were toast if he hit you with his patented bull charge, but a perfectly timed glove (on his second hop) reined him in.

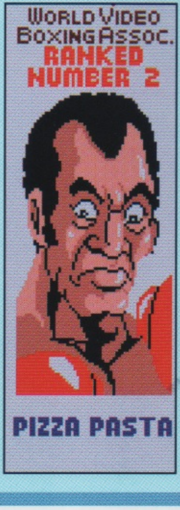
Kid Quick

A Chris Rock look-alike from good old Brooklyn, Kid Quick gave you a much needed breather after the Clubber Lang nastiness of Bald Bull. While you rested, you came up with a topic: Kid Quick was neither a kid nor quick. Discuss.


WORLD VIDEO
BOXING ASSOC.
RANKED
NUMBER 3
KID QUICK





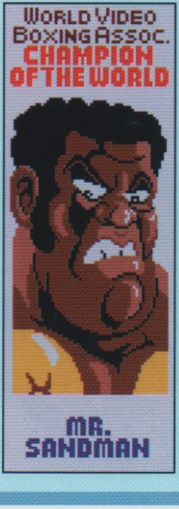

WORLD VIDEO
BOXING ASSOC.
RANKED
NUMBER 2
PIZZA PASTA

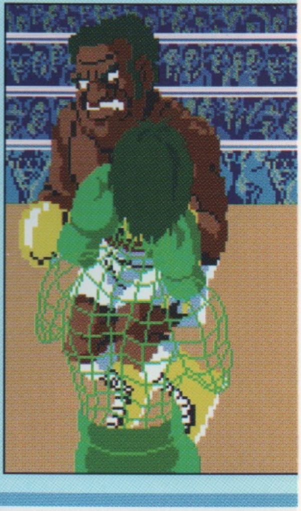
Pizza Pasta

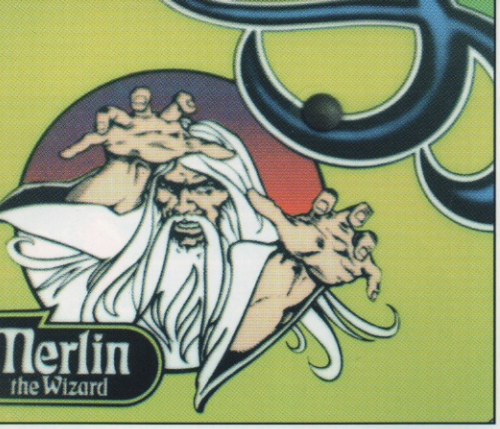
The stereotyped paesan Pizza Pasta was the game's resident Italian Stallion, but his carb-induced paunch and Bela Lugosi widow's peak made him more Rocky and Bullwinkle than Rocky Balboa. Yo, aspirin!

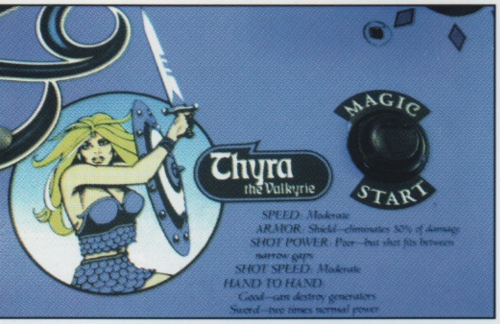
Mr. Sandman

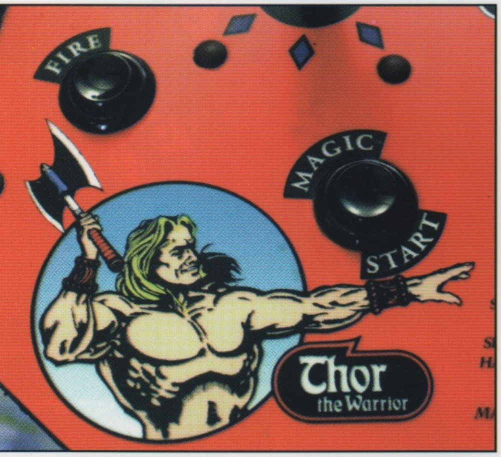
In the main event, you squared off against the fearsome Philadelphian Mr. Sandman, a 312 behemoth in yellow boots. Yawn! By avoiding his unpredictable roundhouses and quickly counter-punching, it was lights out for the former Champion of the World. Grab that belt!

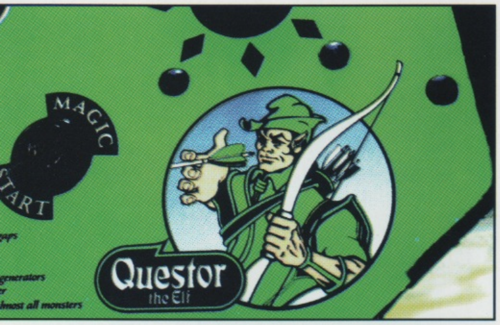

WORLD VIDEO
BOXING ASSOC.
CHAMPION
OF THE WORLD
MR.
SANDMAN




Merlin
the Wizard


MAGIC
START
Thyra
the Valkyrie
SPEED: Moderate
ARMOR: Shield—eliminates 50% of damage
SHOT POWER: Poor—but shot fits between narrow gaps
SHOT SPEED: Moderate
HAND TO HAND:
Good—can destroy generators
Sword—two times normal power


FIRE
MAGIC
START
Thor
the Warrior


MAGIC
START
Questor
the Elf

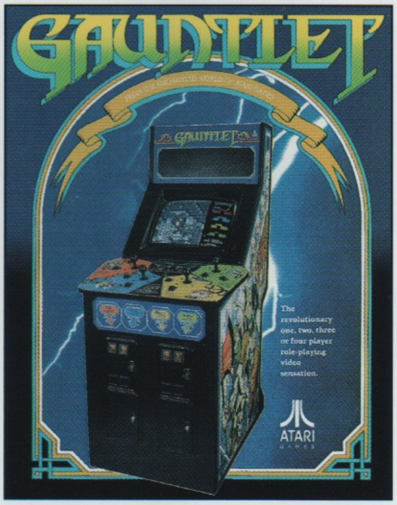
Gauntlet

"Welcome!" The mysterious voice that greeted players as they prepared to plunder the dungeons of Atari's beloved Gauntlet is one of video gamedom's most easily recognizable. Not that anyone liked him; the baritone buffoon chided your miscues ("Eat your food. . .don't shoot it!") and reminded you of the obvious ("Warrior is about to die!"). Hey, dude—no comments from the peanut gallery!

It must have been very easy for Mr. Helpful to kibbitz because he wasn't partaking in the ruinous action. Taking a cue from Dungeons & Dragons—and improving upon more primitive maze video games like Exidy's Vanguard and Konami's Tutankham—you explored a series of labyrinths looking for treasure, magic potions and health-restoring food. But the freaks sure came out at night: You were outnumbered at least 50 to one by various enemies, including tenacious Ghosts, vanishing Sorcerors, Robotron-like Grunts, and fire-breathing Demons. Worst of all was "Death", a shrouded and nearly invincible numbnut whose touch drained serious health points.

Luckily you could bring friends along on the adventure. The novelty of Gauntlet was that it allowed up to four players—taking on the guise of the buff Warrior, geeky Wizard, spry Elf or sexy Valkyrie—to join in at any time, making it the first game since Atari's 1979 racing hit Sprint 4 to allow more than two people to play at one time. And you needed a strong foursome to do very well at Gauntlet, so perilous was your mission.

Of course, you also hoped that your pals would pull their weight, and not sit back idly while you risked your life (and quarters) fighting goons by yourself. This type of freeloader (usually someone playing a Wizard) would hang back and wait until the rest of the party dispatched the bad guys, and try to abscond with all the succulent roast beef and magic potions. If only that darned narrator would have said something to scold players like "Wizard isn't pulling his weight!"; "Wizard needs manners. . .badly!"; "Wizard is being a total ass!" maybe he would have been a tad more endearing.


GAUNTLET
GAUNTLET
The revolutionary one, two, three or four player role-playing video sensation.
ATARI
GAMES

Logg Rhythm

Gauntlet was designed by Ed Logg, one of Atari's most valued employees. His previous hits included Asteroids, Centipede and Millipede, and he's one of the few classic programmers still churning out titles in the industry today. He recently created the popular San Francisco Rush series of racing games.

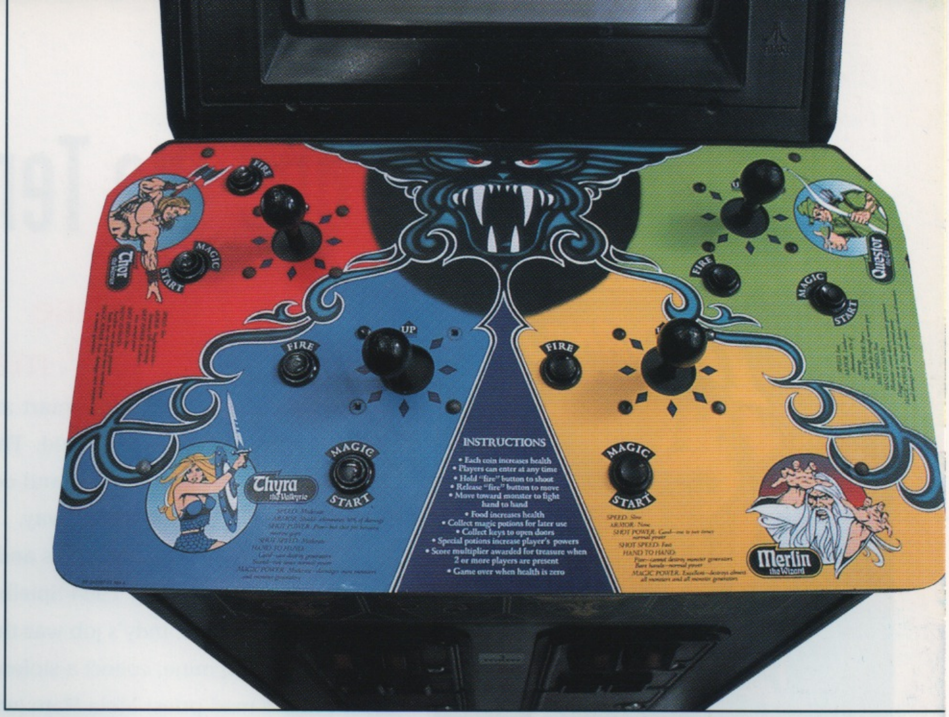
Game: Gauntlet

Year: 1985

Manufacturer: Atari

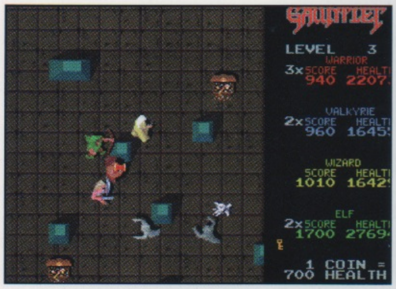
Controls: Eight-direction joysticks, fire button, four magic buttons

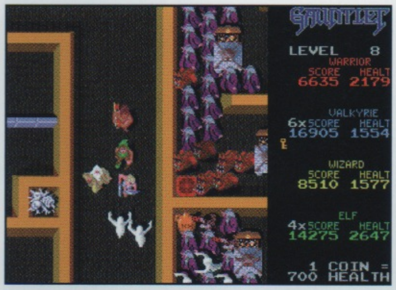
Plot: Using one of four characters—Valkyrie, Wizard, Elf or Warrior—scour a ghoul-infested labyrinth for food, potions and booty

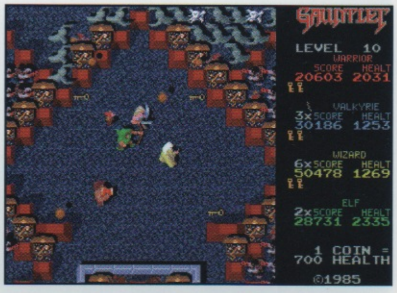

Thor the Warrior
FIRE
MAGIC START
UP
Questor the Elf
Thyra the Valkyrie
Merlin the Wizard
INSTRUCTIONS
• Each coin increases health
• Players can enter at any time
• Hold "fire" button to shoot
• Release "fire" button to move
• Move toward monster to fight hand to hand
• Food increases health
• Collect magic potions for later use
• Collect keys to open doors
• Special potions increase player's powers
• Score multiplier awarded for treasure when 2 or more players are present
• Game over when health is zero

Role Player

Playing Gauntlet with four players resulted in quite a logjam on the control panel. It also created a major dilemma: Which character did you choose to be? Because of their strong attributes and all-around coolness, Warrior and Elf were the most desirable. But their controls were situated at the extreme outsides of the panel; to play them, you had to look at the screen diagonally. The other two characters afforded better views, but then you'd have to be the cruddy Valkyrie or the stinkin' Wizard. Once the game began, though, you didn't much care who you were. You just wanted to kick ass.


GAUNTLET
LEVEL 3
WARRIOR
3x SCORE HEALT
940 2207
VALKYRIE
2x SCORE HEALT
960 1645
WIZARD
SCORE HEALT
1010 1642
ELF
2x SCORE HEALT
1700 2769
1 COIN =
700 HEALTH


GAUNTLET
LEVEL 8
WARRIOR
SCORE HEALT
6635 2179
VALKYRIE
6x SCORE HEALT
16905 1554
WIZARD
SCORE HEALT
8510 1577
ELF
4x SCORE HEALT
14275 2647
1 COIN =
700 HEALTH


GAUNTLET
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WARRIOR
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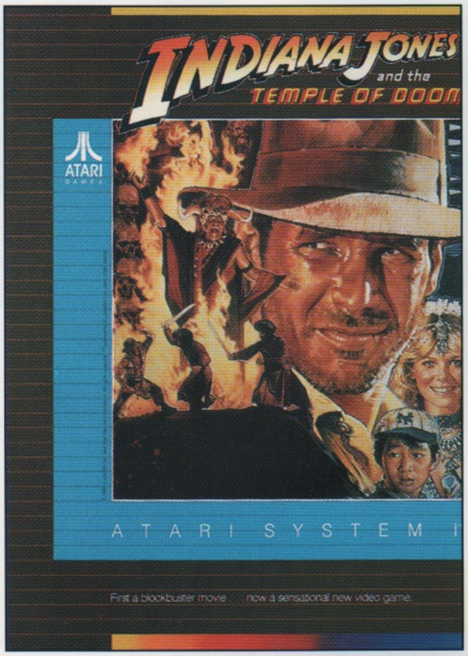
ELF
2x SCORE HEALT
28731 2335
1 COIN =
700 HEALTH
©1985

1985	In headlines:	At theaters:	On TV:	In music:
	Rock Hudson dies from something called AIDS; New Coke fizzles fast	*Back to the Future* stimulates flux capacitor research; yo, Rambo!; "Using the whole fist, Doc?" enters venacular with *Fletch*	Bruce Willis cracks wise on *Moonlighting;* cancellation of *It's Your Move* shocks nation	Ethiopians love "We Are the World;" seemingly everyone except Frank Stallone plays at Live Aid

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

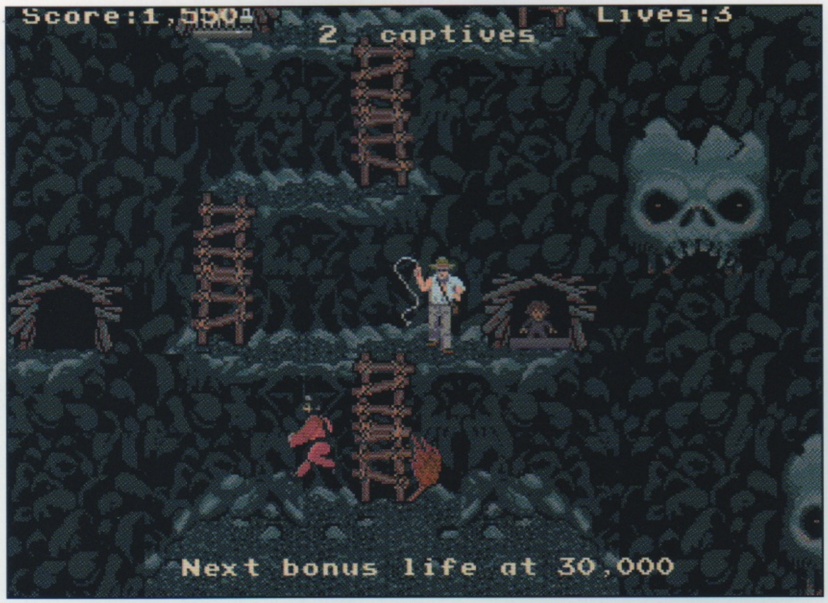

INDIANA JONES
and the
TEMPLE OF DOOM
ATARI
GAMES
ATARI SYSTEM I
First a blockbuster movie ... now a sensational new video game.

Does the phrase "Soon, Kali Ma will rule the world!" mean anything to you?

If you ever played the whip-smart arcade adaptation of the second Indiana Jones movie, it certainly should. That's because some bonkers Indian guy kept repeating the threat over and over and over—so often that it drove you slightly insane. But in a good way.

Right or wrong, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom synchronized nicely with the disappointing 1984 Spielberg-directed sequel to *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* As in the movie, Indy's job was threefold: He had to save imprisoned waifs from a diamond mine, collect a stolen amulet from the titular temple, and stick a fork in the mad priest Mola Ram (who will soon rule the world!). Armed only with his trusty whip, Indy generally ran around in pursuit of his goals and slashed at cobras, screeching bats and the mumbling, bumbling Thugee guards. Extremely narrow pathways and ledges also confounded your fedora-topped adventurer; the celluloid Indy was never this clumsy.

The most confusing part of the game took place on level on which you had to successfully steer a mining cart to the bottom of the tracks. That was


Score:1,550
2 captives
Lives:3
Next bonus life at 30,000

Game: Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

Year: 1985

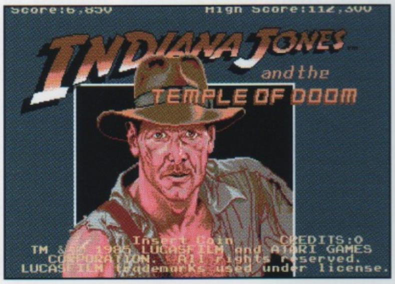
Manufacturer: Atari

Controls: Eight-direction joystick, whip button

Plot: As the inimitable Indiana Jones, rescue children from the clutches of the heart-throwing cleric Mola Ram and recover the mystical Sankara Stone from the Temple of Doom

the clear-cut purpose of the board, but the cart moved so fast that you could never prepare what was coming next—and usually it was something bad, like a broken section of track or a cartful of goons. If you got down to the bottom in one piece, Indy would hop out and say "We walk from here." It was just like the film, only without the little Asian kid Short Round.

The action started afresh if you whipped Mola Ram's human-heart-throwing heine on the rope bridge. Chances are you never got that far, though; Temple of Doom took incredible amounts of skill (not to mention quarters) to master. But that just goes to show how difficult life was for everyone's favorite adventurer, Indiana Jones.


Score:6,850
High Score:112,300
INDIANA JONES
and the
TEMPLE OF DOOM
Insert Coin
CREDITS:0
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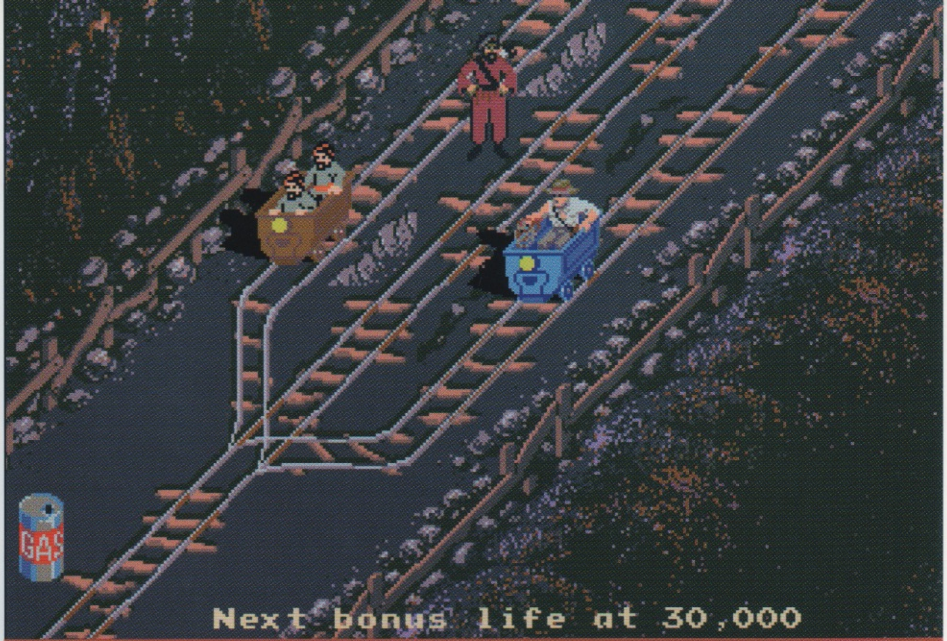
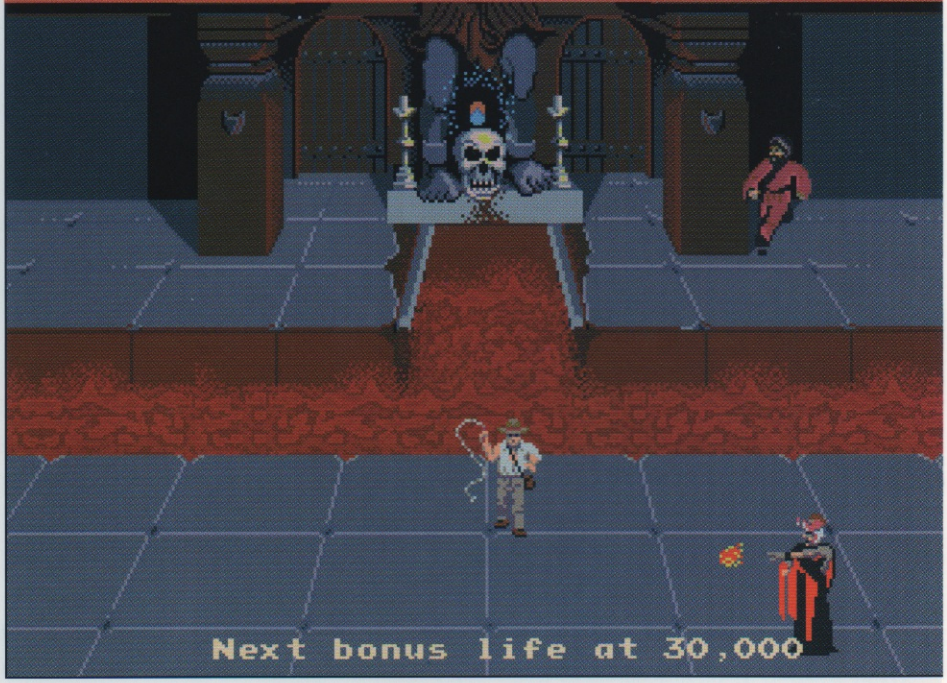
Indy-Cred

Atari lured potential customers to the game with a true-to-life graphical rendering of Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones and a synthesized rendition of John Williams's rousing theme song. Another good choice would have been Devo's "Whip It".


GAS
Next bonus life at 30,000

Life Force

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom gave you the option of inserting one credit for three lives, or two for seven lives. The studly whippersnapper knew that less was more in terms of arcade bravado, but the three-lives game often lasted about as long as your typical heartbeat. Atari also gave you the pleasure of selecting the Easy, Medium or Hard routes, just like in their adaptation of Star Wars. If you wanted to make your game last as long as possible, you took the low road. You chose wisely!


Next bonus life at 30,000

bonus round

Here's what I like to think happened to arcades as we knew them—that is, open for business: One morning, we all woke up with a killer hangover and couldn't muster the strength to trudge down to Aladdin's Castle (or Space Port or Fun Factory, or any of the other somewhat nerdy variations on names for video-game hangouts). This being right around the year 1986, we slumped in our basement beanbags, hooked up the Nintendo NES that we got for Christmas, flipped on the television set, watched a few videos on MTV—hopefully catching a break and getting Falco's "Rock Me Amadeus" and Eddie Murphy's "Party All the Time" back to back—pushed the NES power button when veejay Adam Curry's freakish mane appeared on the screen, and played games for the rest of the day.

After hours and hours of collecting coins and power-ups, we knew that we were meant to be here, at home, where Funyons were readily available and where we could sit and listen to our favorite Mötley Crüe tunes and not have to deal with idiots coming over and putting a quarter up on what is clearly our game of Duck Hunt. It looked almost the same as the stuff at the arcade anyhow, except that Mike Tyson now mysteriously appeared in Punch Out!!, and who didn't respect Iron Mike's authority?

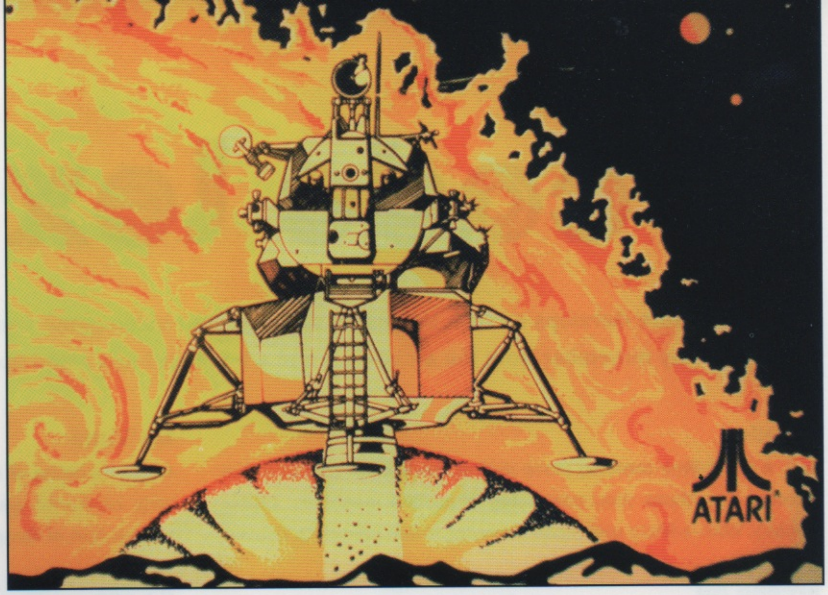
Of course, our bodies went through a brief withdrawal period. We'd venture down to the old arcade once in a while—assuming that it was still there—to play standbys like Track and Field and Star Wars. The other three kids in there looked as shellshocked as we did: Sure, games like Rampage and Ikari Warriors were cool in an old-school sort of way, but these new releases certainly weren't compelling or diverse enough to tear us away from Mario and Luigi anymore.

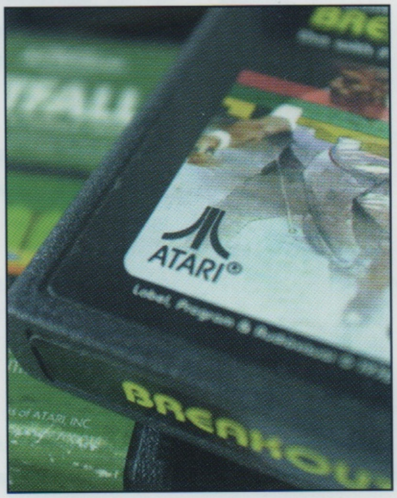
Technology got more powerful and more affordable, and we soon found that arcade titles could be closely replicated in the privacy of our own homes, something that wasn't available in the Atari 2600 days. We sat complacently on our couches, and forced game manufacturers to come to us, rather than the other way around. And they did, every single one of them. The last half of the 1980s went out with a wimper at arcades, with only a handful of uprights—titles like Toobin', Outrun, Double Dragon, Altered Beast, 720°, Narc, Golden Axe—worth their weight in ROM chips. For the first time in the history of man, kids actually wanted to stay at home, where they could pound away on hellions in Ultima, flip goofy Tetris shapes on Game Boys and save the princess in, well, the hundreds of games where you had to save the princess.

So we stayed home. Arcades closed. Life was good. The early '90s success of Street Fighter II and Mortal Kombat temporarily lured zit-faced teens out of their bedroom caves into the few public places that still existed for video-gaming. We older folks even sniffed around a little ourselves. But something was horribly, horribly wrong: The games all looked the same, sounded the same, made you memorize moves the same way and cost upwards of 50 cents to boot. We tried to compete with the kids—all of whom probably grew up watching Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles or listening to Barney records—but we couldn't really muster the enthusiasm. It was so over.

We moved on to Sony PlayStation and Sega Genesis—or even more likely, our newly powerful personal computers. We played Myst, explored the Internet, dabbled in network gaming, and just generally ignored the fact that there was ever such a thing as arcades, and that we used to go to them every weekend and blow our entire allowances there. But every once in a while we'd remember, wistfully, what it used to be like. We'd get flashbacks of wasting the invaders from Galaga while tossing back beers at our local. We'd start whistling the exciting Time Pilot theme song while commuting to work in the morning. We'd stumble across a too-realistic game like Carnevil at a movie theater and go, "How exactly is that more fun than Missile Command?" And then it would hit us: My God, why did we ever stop going to the arcade?

Retrogaming sprung up to quench such nostalgia, which helped wash away a little of the guilt we felt for having deserted the arcade. Programs such as MAME, which does its best to emulate old-school games, and Stella, which reproduces Atari 2600 titles, allowed us to rediscover favorites like Congo Bongo and Yars' Revenge. Seemingly every hipster bar in the country installed a sit-down Ms. Pac-Man machine. Even some daring folks stocked their arcades full of the classics, places like Seattle's excellent Hi-Score and Ann Arbor's homey Pinball Pete's. Through it all, the twinge of guilt still remained.





But who would have it any other way? Certainly not the current crop of gamers, who are two or three generations removed from the people who grew up on Breakout and Space Invaders. They're perfectly content beating the living crud out of each other at home. Certainly not the video-game industry, which is raking in more money than ever.

Us? Well, to be honest, we actually kind of like sitting on our couches and reminiscing about the good old days. Because that's what they are: Good and old. While we're at it, we'll fire up a nice game of Soul Calibur or MLB 2001 on our Dreamcasts and hang loose with some of our friends. We know that it's not nearly as rewarding as proving ourselves to total strangers, but at least we don't have to bum rides off of people. The arcades of our youth are gone, and we're finally okay with that.

arcade lexicon

Every subculture develops its own language, and obsessed video-game fans were no different. Here are some key terms you may remember from the arcade era and a few that I just made up.

arcade

n. 1. a good-time meeting place during the Golden Age of Video Games, sometimes also containing Skee-Ball machines, Chexx Hockey, Wac-a-Mole and those annoying crane games 2. heaven

arcade rat

n. a person who was at the arcade every time you were there and probably every time you weren't; characteristics included a glazed-over look on the face and, quite possibly, a Triumph concert T-shirt

board

n. one of various interchangeable terms used to describe a certain position in a game [SYN: level, stage, wave]

Bubbles master

n. a very sad human

credit

n. a unit of measurement equivalent to one game

Da Vinci

n. the inputting of initials in the high-score table after a particularly masterful game [Example: "Slap your Da Vinci on that million-five of Tempest, dude. You earned it."]

de-res

n. death by grid bug or MCP Cone

doubles

n. a two-player game, usu. prefaced by "Wanna play?"

free game

n. a momentous event, usu. sending the lucky recipient into euphoria [Example: "When I found out I got an A on my Babylonians exam, it was like someone gave me a free game of Robotron."]

game hog

n. a selfish human whose place is reserved in the ninth circle of hell

game over

int. an unavoidable event that may cause great anguish [Example: "The Gooch said he was going to beat me up after school! Game over! Game over, man!"]

guy

n. one of various interchangeable terms used to describe the icon you control on-screen [SYN: life, man]

intruder alert

int. a warning cry used when a total dweeb was entering your airspace [Example: "Intuder alert! Intruder alert! Here comes Dorfman."]

level

n. one of various interchangeable terms used to describe a certain position in a game [SYN: board, stage, wave]

life

n. one of various interchangeable terms used to describe the icon you control on-screen [SYN: guy, man]

man

n. one of various interchangeable terms used to describe the icon you control on-screen [SYN: guy, life]

mario

vb. to jump over something unlikely [Example: "Can you believe how quickly that fat-ass marioed over the table to get to the Ho-Hos?"]

Pac-Man elbow

n. a mild form of tendinitis stemming from the overuse of the joystick in the game Pac-Man [See also: Space Invaders wrist]

Pac-Man Fever

n. 1. a phenomenon singular to the early-1980s arcade industry that caused millions of people to deplete their savings on paraphernalia relating to a yellow pie-shaped character 2. the title of a popular video-game-themed novelty song and album by Buckner and Garcia

pong

adj. something dated [Example: "Look at that really old guy on the Lady Bug machine. He's so pong!"]

pooyan

1. adj. a stupid thing, probably derived from a stupid pig-themed arcade game of the same name [Example: "Your idea to put Capri Sun in my Froot Loops was pooyan, yo!"] 2. n. a sexual moron. [Example: "That pooyan got caught whacking off in the locker room during P.E."]

put a quarter up

vb. to stake a claim on the subsequent game on a certain machine [Example: "If you want to kick this game hog off Star Wars, you'd better put a quarter up, dude."]

Space Invaders wrist

n. a condition brought on through overuse of the ergonomically challenged controls of the 1978 game Space Invaders [See also: Pac-Man elbow]

stage

n. one of various interchangeable terms used to describe a certain position in a game [SYN: board, level, wave]

Stargate shakes

n. a condition resulting from overloading your synapses on the Williams classic, or a similarly difficult game

token

n. the unit of currency at most arcades, usu. branded with the words "No Cash Value"

NO CASH VALUE
NO CASH VALUE

too-old guy

n. one of a certain breed of man, age indeterminate, who really should have had better things to do than play Galaga all day, and yet there he was

video-game athlete

n. a term applied to exceptional video-game players in an attempt to dispel the notion that video games are for nerds

video-game junkie

n. a video-game addict no longer in control of his or her quarter-dispensing "on/off" switch

video jones

n. a strong urge to play your favorite game, especially at inappropriate times [Example: "Right in the middle of the sermon, I got the video jones for Sinistar."]

vidiot

n. a derogatory term for a video-game addict, usu. wielded by a frustrated parent

wave

n. one of various interchangeable terms used to describe a certain position in a game [SYN: board, level, stage]

wokka-wokka-wokka

n. a gobbling noise that sometimes resurfaces to recovering video-game junkies in vivid flashbacks

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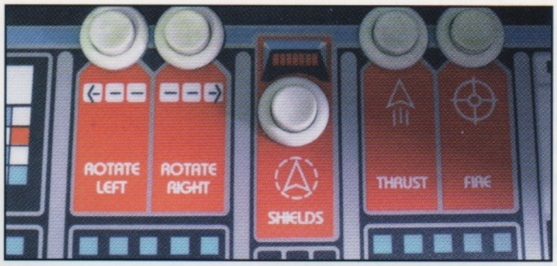

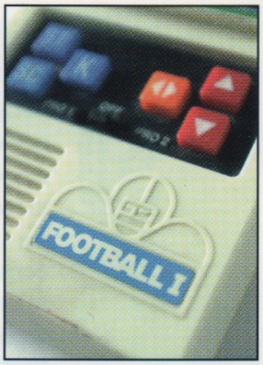

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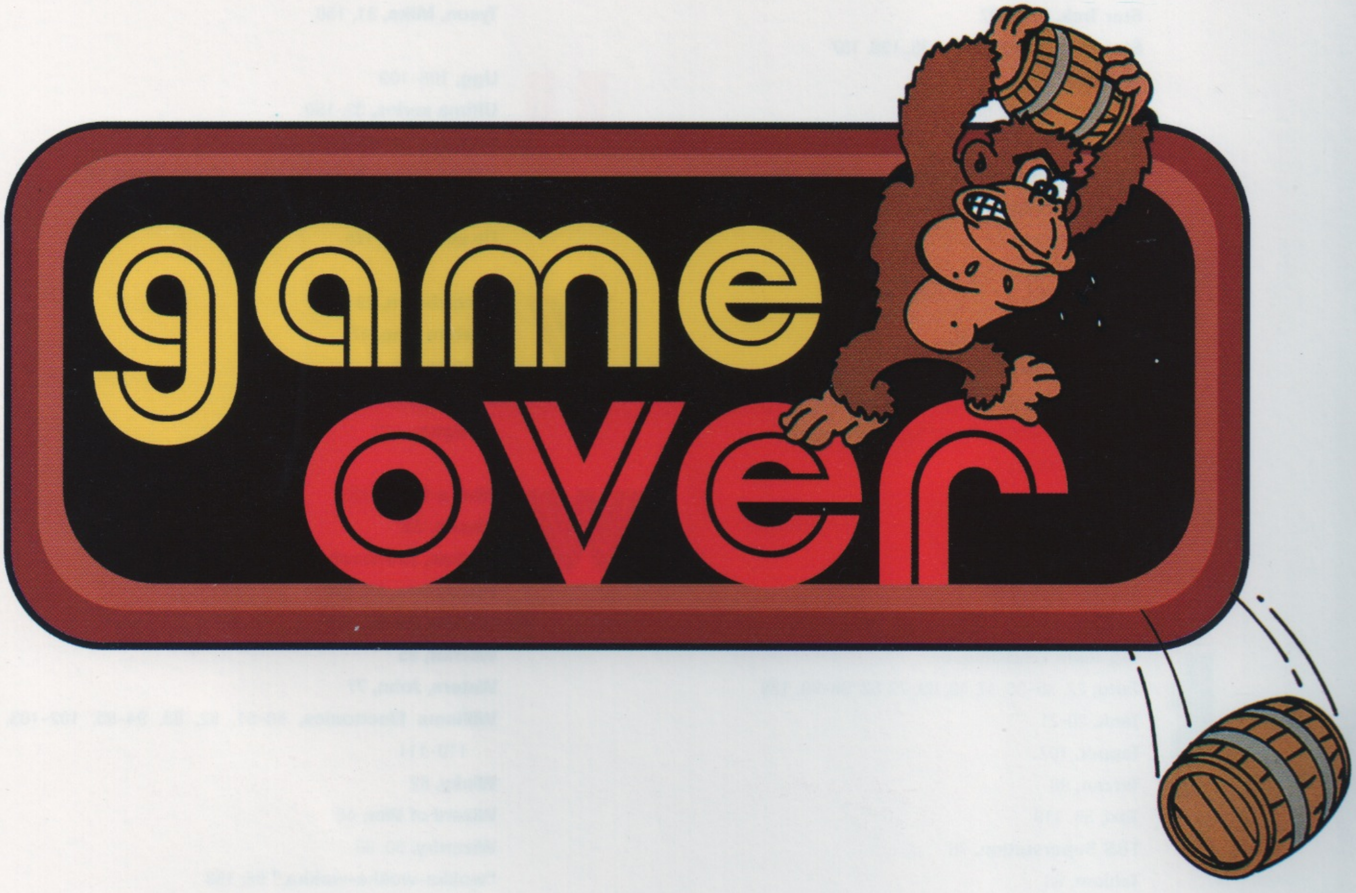
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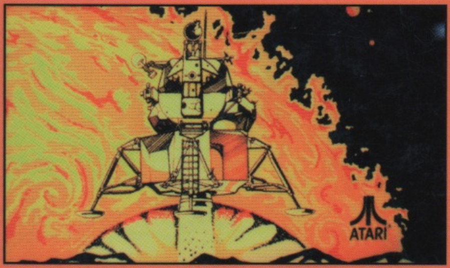

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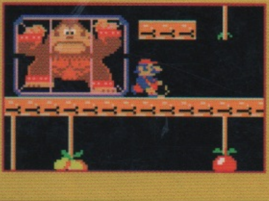

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